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20 years of giving voice to Africans



Lived poverty on the rise

Decade of living-standard gains ends in Africa

By Robert Mattes

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Summary

Economic destitution – whether measured as the frequency with which people go without basic necessities or as the proportion of people who live on less than \$1.90 a day – declined steadily in Africa between 2005 and 2015. However, the findings of Afrobarometer Round 7 surveys, conducted in 34 African countries between late 2016 and late 2018, demonstrate that improvements in living standards have come to a halt and “lived poverty” is once again on the rise.

To prevent squandering hard-won gains in Africans' living standards, the data point to the necessity of a renewed commitment by citizens, governments, and international donors to defending democracy and expanding service-delivery infrastructure.

Key findings

- Between 2005 and 2015, Afrobarometer surveys tracked a steady improvement in the living conditions of the average African. Measured as the frequency with which people go without a basket of basic necessities (food, clean water, health care, heating fuel, and cash income), “lived poverty” dropped in a sustained fashion over this period – a trend matched by consumption-based estimates of poverty by the World Bank.
- The most recent Afrobarometer surveys, however, suggest that Africa is in danger of squandering these gains in living standards. While the citizens of most African countries are still doing better than they were in 2005/2006, deprivation of basic necessities – captured by our Lived Poverty Index – has increased in about half of surveyed countries since 2015. The trend is similar for “severe lived poverty,” the extent to which people experience frequent shortages of basic necessities.
- Lived poverty varies widely across the continent. At one extreme, people rarely experience deprivation in Mauritius. At the other, the average person went without several basic necessities several times in the preceding year in Guinea and Gabon. In general, lived poverty is highest in Central and West Africa, and lowest in North Africa.
- Lived poverty also varies widely *within* societies. Reflecting the legacies of the “urban bias” of successive post-independence governments, rural residents continue to endure lived poverty far more frequently than those who live in suburbs and cities.
- A multilevel, multivariate regression analysis of more than 40,000 respondents across Africa reveals that people who live in urban areas, those who have higher levels of education, and those who have a job (especially in a middle-class occupation) are less likely to live in poverty, as are younger people and men.
- But besides personal characteristics, we locate even more important factors at the level of government and the state. First, Africans who live in countries with longer experiences of democratic government are less likely to live in poverty.
- Second, people who live in communities where the state has installed key development infrastructure such as paved roads, electricity grids, and piped-water systems are less likely to go without basic necessities. Indeed, the combined efforts of African governments and international donors in building development infrastructure, especially in rural areas, appears to have played a major role in bringing down levels of poverty – at least until recently.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of quality of life, governance, and democracy. Seven rounds of surveys have been completed since 1999. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples. Sample sizes of 1,200 or 2,400 yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-3 or 2 percentage points, respectively, at a 95% confidence level.

Round 7 interviews with 45,823 citizens in 34 countries represent the views of more than three-fourths of Africans (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country findings such as regional or Africa-wide averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

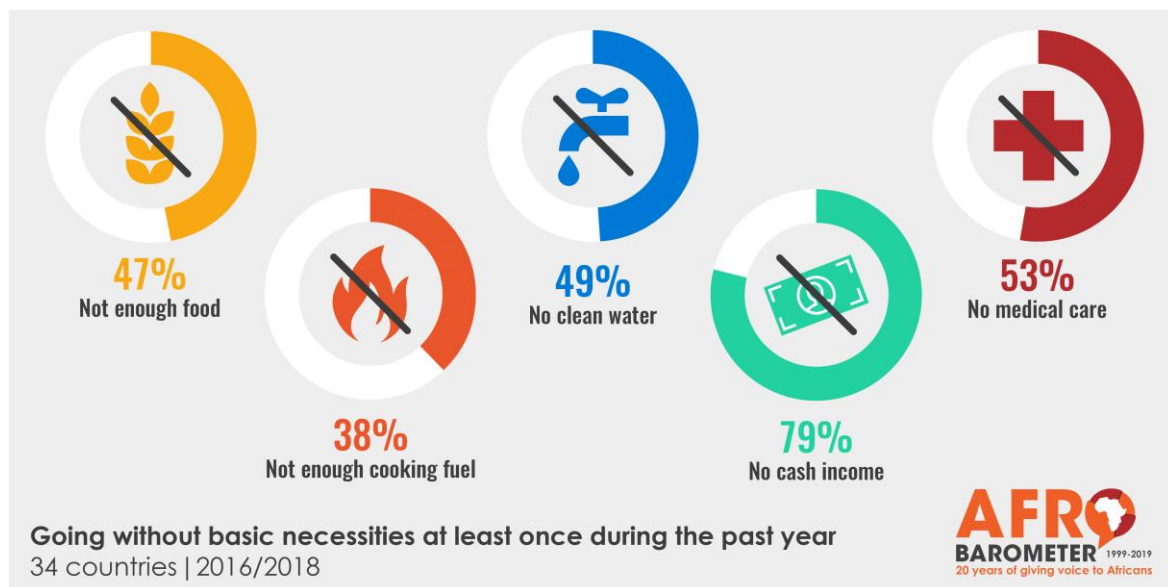
In this Pan-Africa Profile, we focus on findings from the last round of surveys regarding the extent to which Africans are unable to secure minimal basic necessities, or what we call "lived poverty," and how things have changed over the past 15 years.

Lived poverty in Africa

Most people believe that poverty in the developing world has stayed the same or worsened.¹ In fact, poverty has been coming down steadily, whether measured as the frequency with which people are unable to secure basic necessities or by individual consumption.²

Afrobarometer surveys have found that the average rate at which Africans go without a basket of basic necessities declined between 2005/2006 and 2014/2015.

Afrobarometer asks respondents: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income?* A range of response options are offered: "never" for those who experienced no shortages, "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," and "always." Because these questions are asked in all surveyed countries, we are able not only to monitor shifts in the levels and nature of poverty over time, but also to compare experiences across countries and regions.



¹ For instance, a 2016 survey conducted in the United Kingdom by Oxfam found that 87% of respondents thought that poverty was staying the same or getting worse (Desjardins, 2018).

² Ritchie and Roser (2018) have concluded that the world met and surpassed the Millennium Development Goal for poverty. In the period 2000-2015, the percentage of people living in extreme poverty (then measured as <\$1.25 a day) fell from 47% in developing regions to 23.5%.

Based on average Lived Poverty Index (LPI) scores, which express the mean responses across these dimensions, lived poverty fell from 1.31 (on a scale from 0 to 4) in 2005/2006 to 1.02 in 2014/2015 across 16 countries surveyed throughout this time period. “Severe lived poverty,” expressed as the proportion who went without necessities on a frequent basis (“many times” or “always”), likewise fell from a high point of 22% in 2005/2006 to 14% in 2014/2015. This trend matches consistent decreases in poverty using a very different consumption-based measure, the proportion of Africans living on less than \$1.90 a day, from 58% in 1999 to 41% in 2015, according to World Bank estimates (Jolliffe & Lugo, 2018). (The World Bank has not produced any more recent estimates.)

However, more recent Afrobarometer data suggest that Africa may be losing many of its hard-earned gains. In its latest round of surveys, lived poverty began to move upward again. While the average person is still better off than 10-15 years ago, the mean LPI score increased from 1.16 in 2014/2015 to 1.22 in 2016/2018 across the 33 countries included in both survey rounds. Similarly, across 33 countries, “severe lived poverty” moved upward from 17% to 19%.

The extent of lived poverty

Large numbers of Africans are still failing to meet their most basic needs. Across 34 countries surveyed in 2016/2018, more than half (53%) of all respondents report facing shortages of medicine or medical services at least once in the previous 12 months, and nearly as many experienced shortages of clean water (49%) and food (47%). Nearly four in 10 experienced shortages of cooking fuel (38%) (Figure 1).

Reflecting the continent's ongoing employment crisis, the most commonly cited form of deprivation remains lack of access to cash income, with four-fifths (79%) reporting that they went without cash at least once in the previous year. While cash income is not in itself a basic need, access to it can enable citizens to meet their basic and non-basic needs. Income shortages therefore have many spillover effects on people's lives. The fact that four-fifths of Africans report having gone without cash income at least once – and that 40% did so frequently – poses a major development challenge, as many adults on the continent cannot afford to buy resources for immediate use or to invest in assets.

Measuring poverty

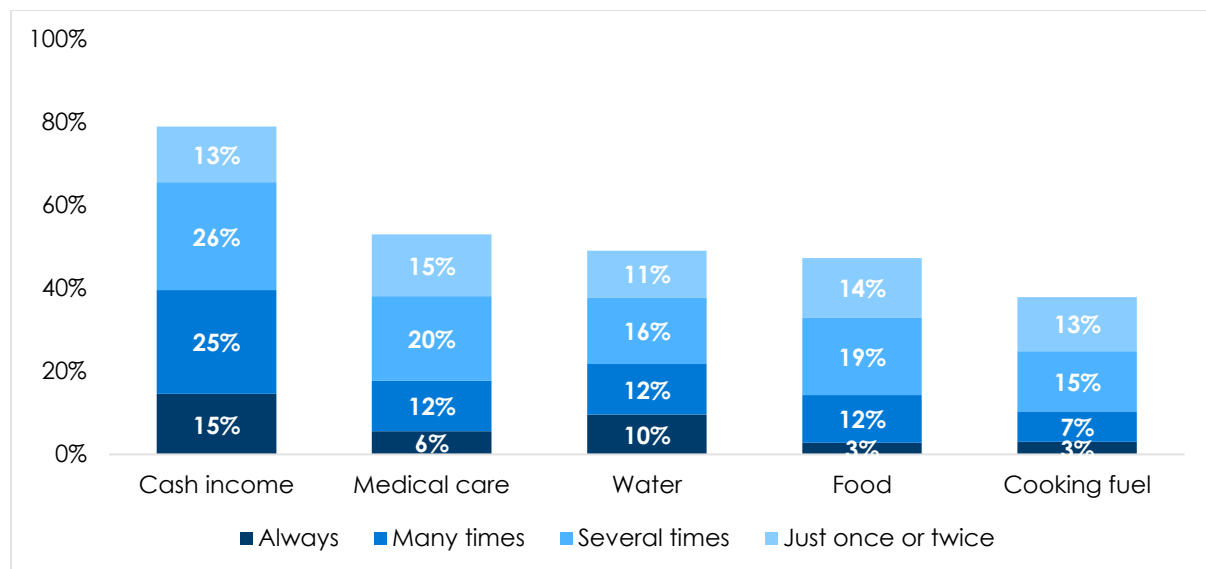
Poverty can be measured in a number of different ways. At the national level, all countries produce national accounts data to calculate their gross national income (GNI), which is used to summarize national wealth and the total state of the economy. However, some analysts have questioned the capacity of many African countries' national statistics systems to generate these numbers reliably (Jerven, 2013).

At the personal or household level, national statistics offices conduct large household surveys to measure incomes, expenditures, assets, and access to services, which are then used to calculate national poverty lines and place individuals above or below these lines. The Millennium Development Goal that focused on reducing the number of people living on less than \$1.90 a day is a good example. However, such surveys are expensive and are conducted infrequently in many African countries. Other development organizations collect data on the consequences of poverty in a given country, such as the proportion of people who don't use improved drinking water sources or the proportion of children under age 5 who are underweight.

As a contribution to the tracking of poverty in Africa, Afrobarometer offers the Lived Poverty Index (LPI), an experiential measure that is based on a series of survey questions about how frequently people actually go without basic necessities during the course of a year. The LPI measures a portion of the concept of poverty that is not captured well by other measures, and thus offers an important complement to official statistics on poverty and development. Because people are the best judges of their own interests, survey respondents are best placed to tell us about their quality of life, though they might not be able to do it with a great deal of precision. If Amartya Sen (1999) is right and the value of one's standard of living lies in the living itself, an experiential measure of shortages of the basic necessities of life takes us directly to the central core of the concept of poverty.

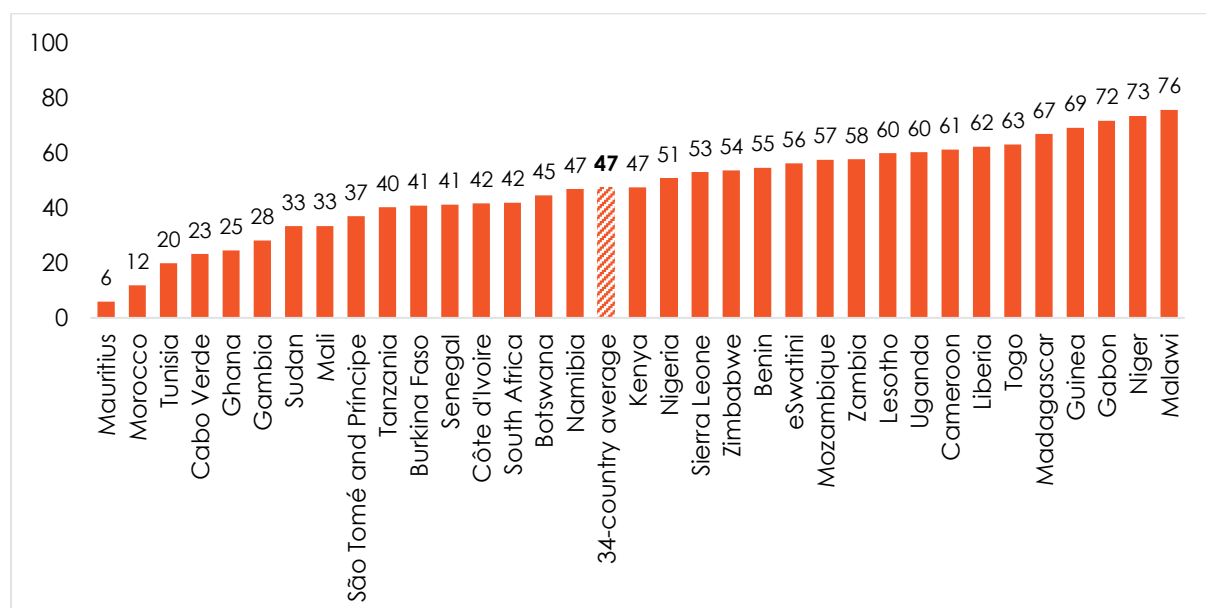
But while we once might have seen extensive poverty as a defining characteristic of the African continent, this is no longer the case. Instead, the quality of livelihoods varies widely across countries, as well as within societies. In terms of food, for instance, fewer than one in 10 Mauritians (6%) experienced a shortage in the previous year, compared to three-quarters of Nigeriens (73%) and Malawians (76%) (Figure 2). Similarly, only one in 20 Mauritians (5%) and around one in three Ghanaians (32%), Cabo Verdeans (33%), and South Africans (34%) went without needed medicine or clinic visits, compared to more than three-quarters of citizens in Togo (76%) and Gabon (79%) (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Going without basic necessities in Africa | 34 countries | 2016/2018



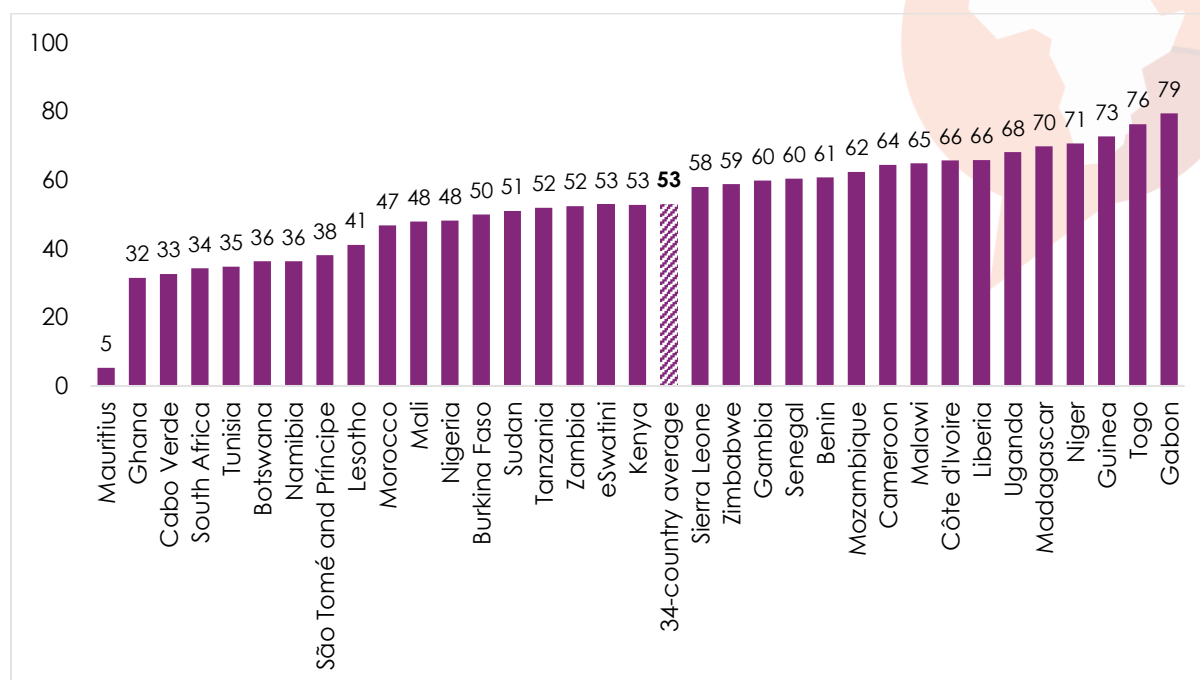
Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income? (Note: Due to rounding, summed response categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of categories shown in graphics.)

Figure 2: Going without food (at least once) (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough food to eat? (% who say "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always")

Figure 3: Going without medical care (at least once) (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without medicines or medical treatment? (% who say “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

An index of lived poverty

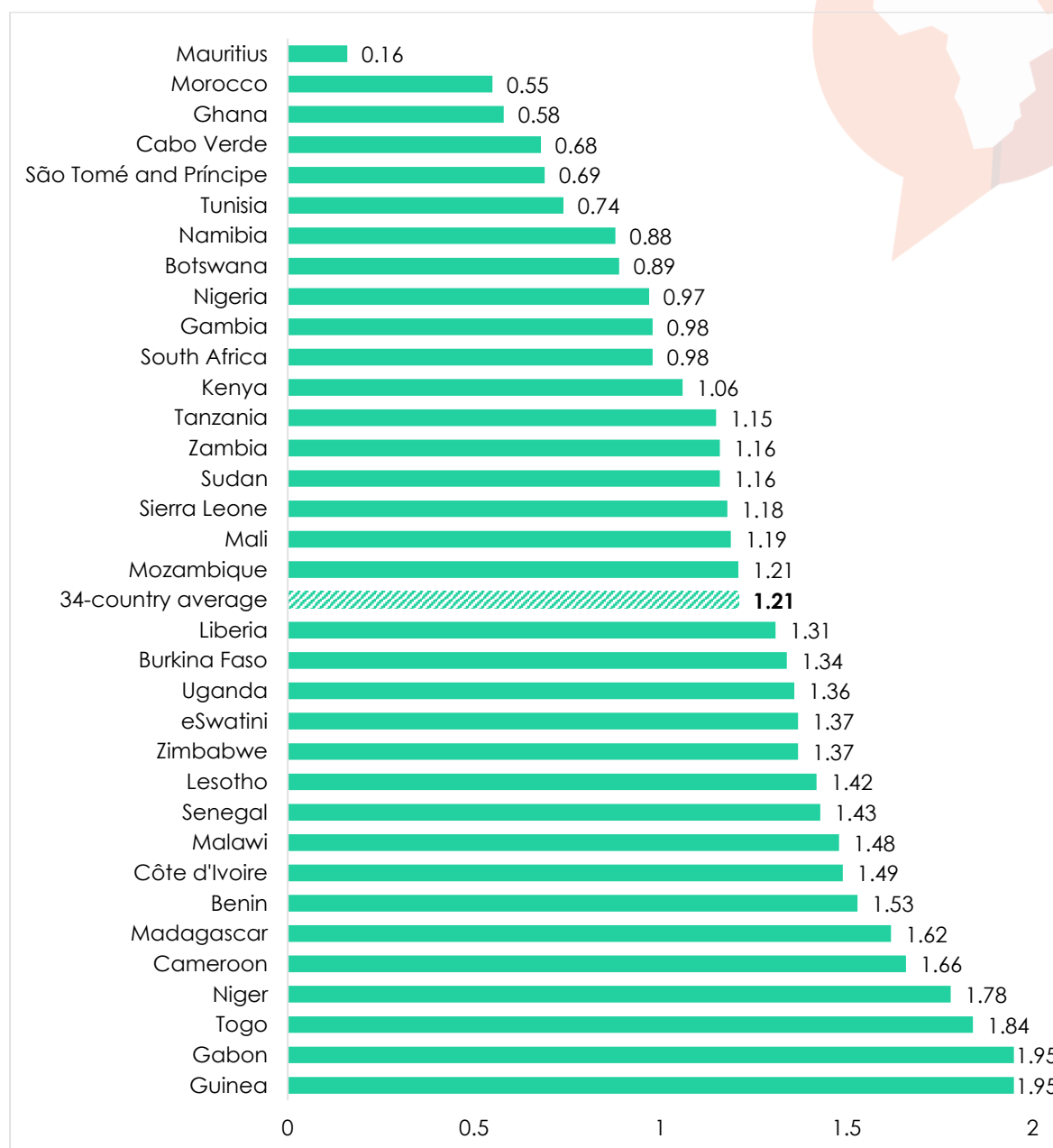
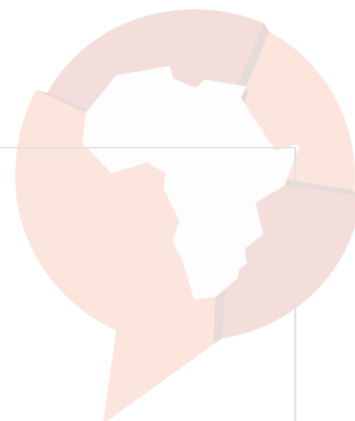
Treating the responses to Afrobarometer's five “gone without” questions as a continuous scale, we can combine them to calculate an average score for each respondent and for each country that captures the overall level of a phenomenon we call “lived poverty.” The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) score ranges along a five-point scale from 0 (which can be thought of as no lived poverty) to 4 (which would reflect a constant absence of *all* basic necessities).³

The score for the mean level of lived poverty across all 34 countries in 2016/2018 is 1.21, and the median African respondent went without each of these basic necessities “once or twice” over the previous year. However, as suggested above by the responses to specific questions, there are significant cross-national variations around that mean. The highest index scores can be found in Guinea (1.95), Gabon (1.95), and Togo (1.84) – the median person in these countries experiences shortages across our basket of basic necessities “several times” a year. In sharp contrast, the typical person in Mauritius (0.16) “never” goes without (Figure 4).

In general, Central and West African countries cluster at the bottom of the scale with the worst lived poverty, while North African countries dominate the top with the least poverty. A comparison of average LPI scores by region confirms that these apparent regional differences are real. Respondents who live in Central Africa (with an average LPI score of 1.43) and West Africa (1.30) experience shortages most frequently, followed by those in East (1.19) and Southern (1.14) Africa, while those who live in North Africa (0.82) are least likely to suffer shortages (not shown).

³ Previous research has demonstrated that this scale has impressive internal validity as well as reliability that is strong and consistent across all country samples and across all survey rounds (see Mattes, 2008). In the most recent Round 7 surveys, factor analysis extracted a single dimension with an Eigenvalue of 2.60 that explains 51.9% of the common variance (reliability (alpha) = .765). For independent validations of the scale, see Meyer and Keyser (2016) and Odhiambo (2019).

Figure 4: Lived Poverty Index | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Lived Poverty Index (LPI) scores reflect average deprivation of five basic necessities on a scale of 0 (no deprivation) to 4 (constant absence of all basic necessities).

Severe lived poverty

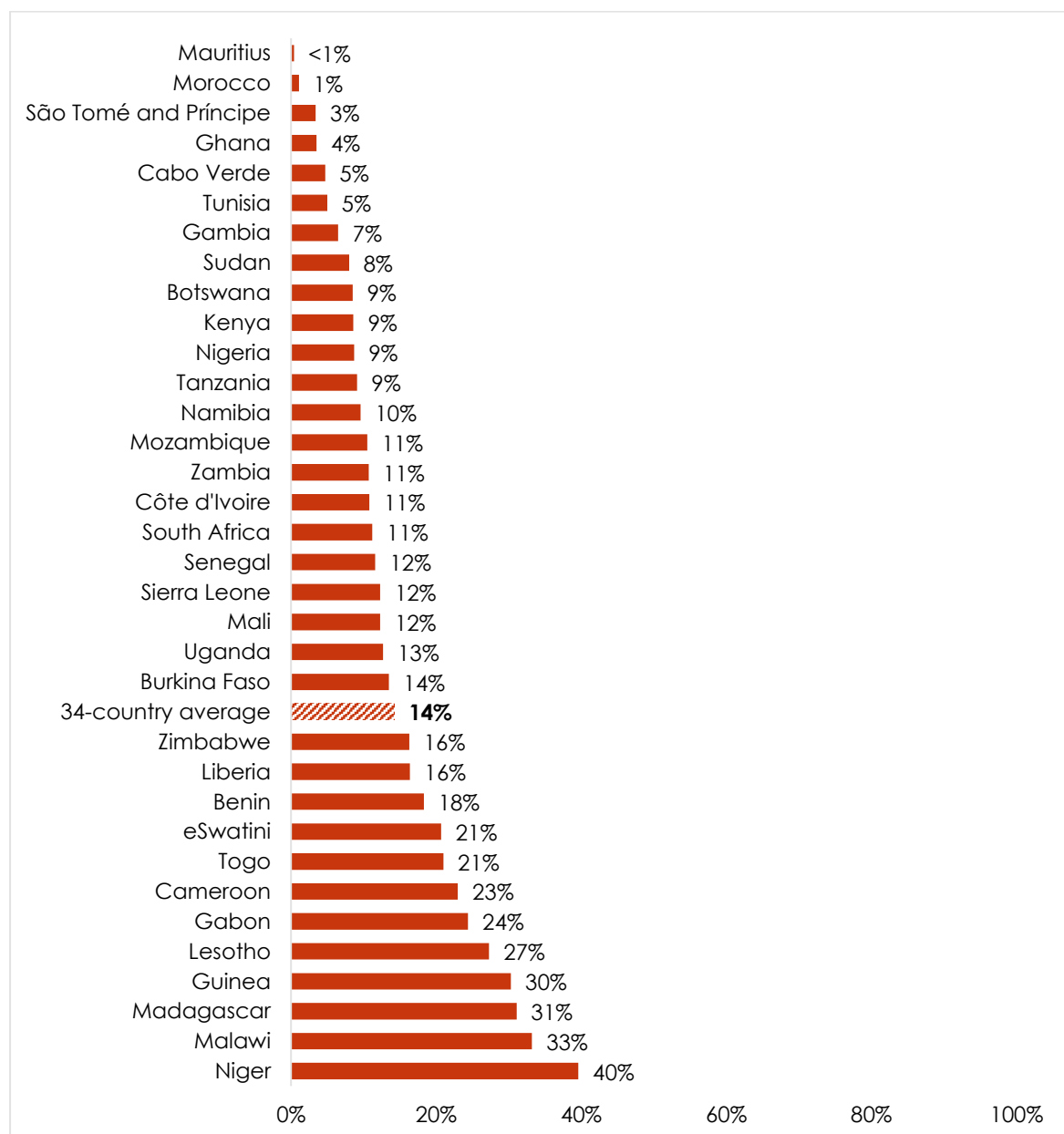
Even more troubling is the intensity of deprivation. Across Africa, between one in five and one in 10 people encountered *frequent* shortages (“many times” or “always”) in the previous year with respect to water (22%), medicine or medical treatment (18%), food (14%), and cooking fuel (10%). We refer to this as “severe lived poverty.”

One of the potential statistical limitations of the LPI is that it treats each additional increment in the response scale the same (e.g. the difference between “never” and “just once or twice” is treated the same as that between “sometimes” and “many times”), which may not be strictly appropriate. One way to check this is by calculating the most intense or extreme reports of shortages – those who say they went without “many times” or “always” – and see whether these responses follow the same general pattern across countries as the overall index.

Looking at the country rankings of those who frequently went without sufficient food (Figure 5) and medical care (Figure 6), we observe roughly the same country rankings as we do in the proportions who went without food or medical care at least once (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). For instance, with regard to food, Mauritians and Moroccans experienced the lowest levels of both overall and severe deprivation, while Nigeriens and Malawians fared worst by both measures. Similarly for medical care, Mauritians experienced the least frequent shortages, defined either way, and Malagasy, Nigeriens, Guineans, Togolese, and Gabonese the most frequent shortages on both scales.

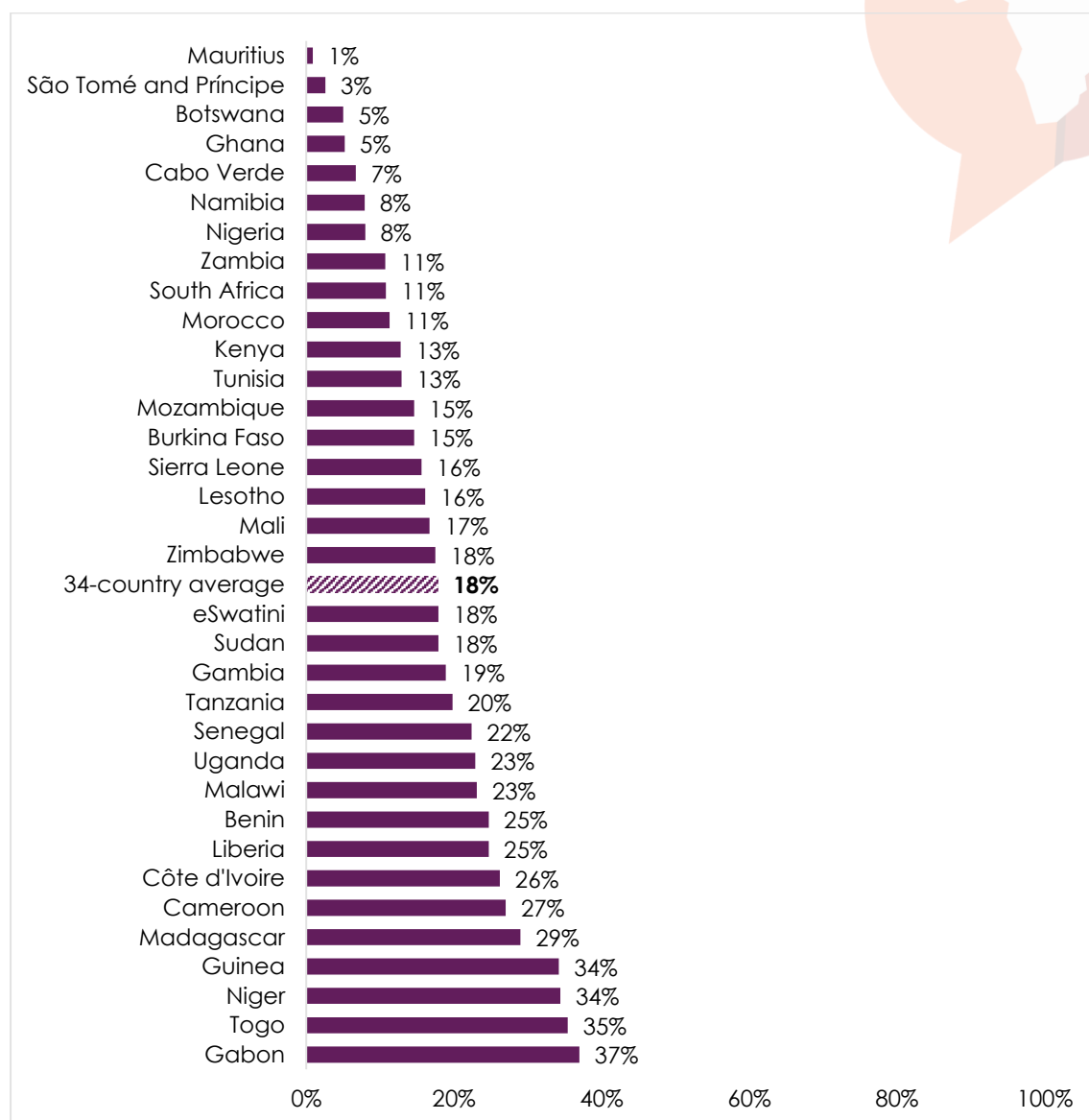
At the same time, there are also some notable differences. For instance, São Tomé and Príncipe ranks much more favourably compared to other African countries when we focus on frequent food shortages, while Lesotho fares much worse. And São Tomé and Príncipe and Botswana rank more favourably with regard to frequent medical shortages, while Cameroon does appreciably worse.

Figure 5: Frequent shortages of food (many times/always) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough food to eat? (% who say "many times" or "always")

Figure 6: Frequent shortages of medical care (many times/always) | 34 countries
| 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without medicines or medical treatment? (% who say "many times" or "always")

To get a more systematic grip on severe deprivation across the basket of basic necessities, we calculate the proportion of people who, on average, experience frequent shortages across each dimension.⁴ Across all 34 countries, an average of one in five people (19%) experience severe lived poverty, going without food, water, medical care, cooking fuel, and cash income on a frequent basis.

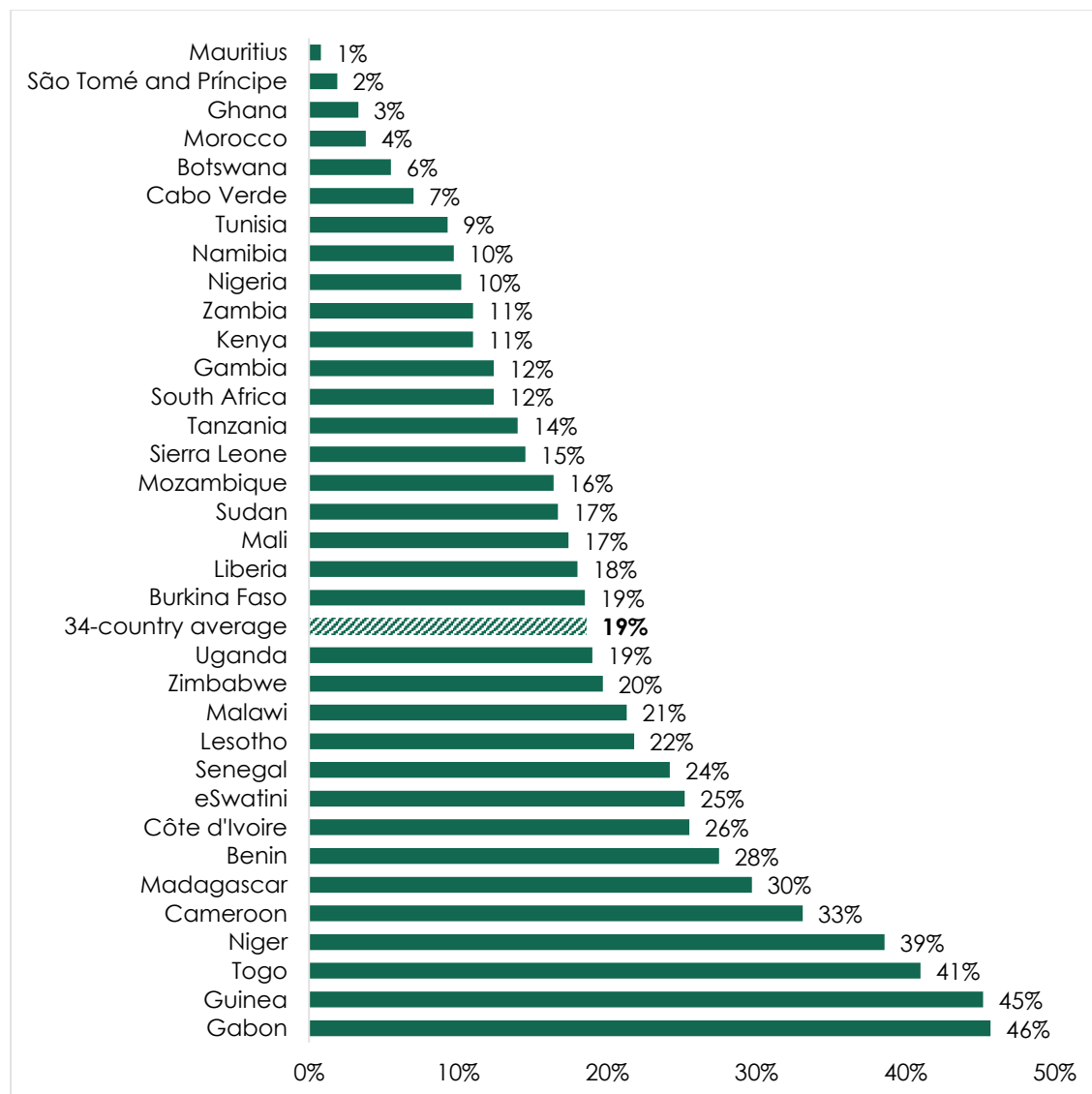
This method produces an estimate of "severe lived poverty" that is substantially lower than the World Bank's estimate of "extreme poverty." The latest (2015) World Bank data suggest that for the 36 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2014/2015, 32% of all households lived on less than \$1.90 a day. During that period, Afrobarometer surveys found that 17%

⁴ Statistically, this involves counting only those who score 2.20 or higher on the 0-4 scale. While other combinations of individual scores may produce this average score, what it basically entails is that the typical respondent experiences shortages "many times" across all dimensions and "always" on at least one.

experienced severe lived poverty. This suggests that our measure may be even more successful than the World Bank estimate as a way to isolate the very poorest people.⁵

Severe lived poverty is almost non-existent in São Tomé and Príncipe (2%) and Mauritius (1%) and is relatively rare in Tunisia (9%), Cabo Verde (7%), Botswana (6%), Morocco (4%), and Ghana (3%). At the other extreme, more than four in 10 citizens live in severe poverty in Togo (41%), Guinea (45%), and Gabon (46%) (Figure 7). Once again we find that severe lived poverty is highest in Central (27%) and West Africa (22%) and lowest in North Africa (10%), with Southern (16%) and East (15%) Africa in between.

Figure 7: Severe lived poverty (average of frequent shortages) | 34 countries
| 2016/2018



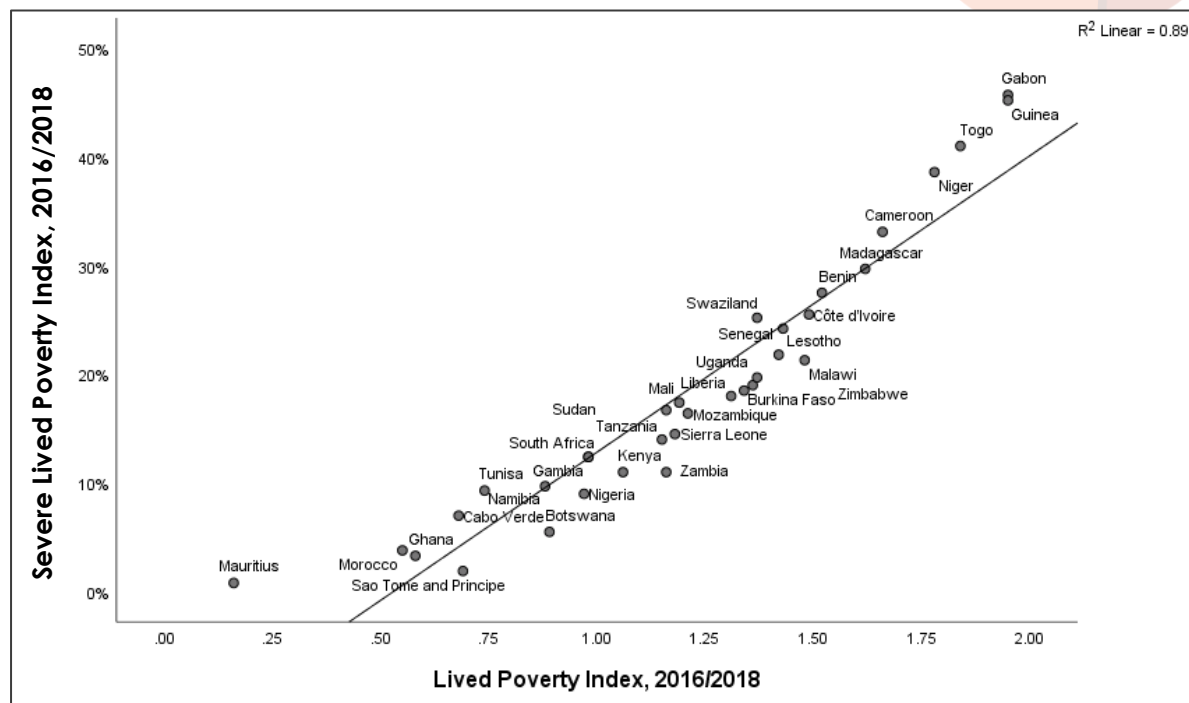
Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income? (Figure shows average proportion who say "many times" or "always")

⁵ Roser and Ortiz-Ospina (2018) point out that, for most of the world, the very poor have not seen their living conditions improve (citing Ravallion (2016) and Lakner & Milanovic (2015)). He argues that this is not as widely known as it should be, and attributes it to the fact that the international poverty line has been set too high, preventing us from understanding dynamics within this group.

Despite a few differences between the country rankings for the Lived Poverty Index (LPI) and those for severe lived poverty, overall the scores for the two scales are strongly correlated (Figure 8).⁶



Figure 8: Lived Poverty and Severe Lived Poverty indices compared | 34 countries
| 2016/2018



Poverty reduction, poverty escalation?

Africa-wide trends

In our Round 6 report (Mattes, Dulani, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016), we found that the frequency of lived poverty was in decline, as of 2015, across a broad range of countries in Africa. Not only had it declined between Round 5 (2011/2013) and Round 6 surveys (2014/2015), where 22 of the 33 countries included in both waves exhibited decreases in lived poverty larger than the sampling error,⁷ but it had also declined over a longer period in at least several of those countries.

The most recent (2016/2018) LPI results, however, demonstrate that the downward trend in lived poverty has not only stopped, it has actually reversed. Looking first at the constituent dimensions of the index, we see continent-wide increases in deprivation of cash income (+4 percentage points), medical care (+3 points), and food and water (+2 points each) since 2014/2015 across the 33 countries that were surveyed in both rounds 6 and 7 (Figure 9).

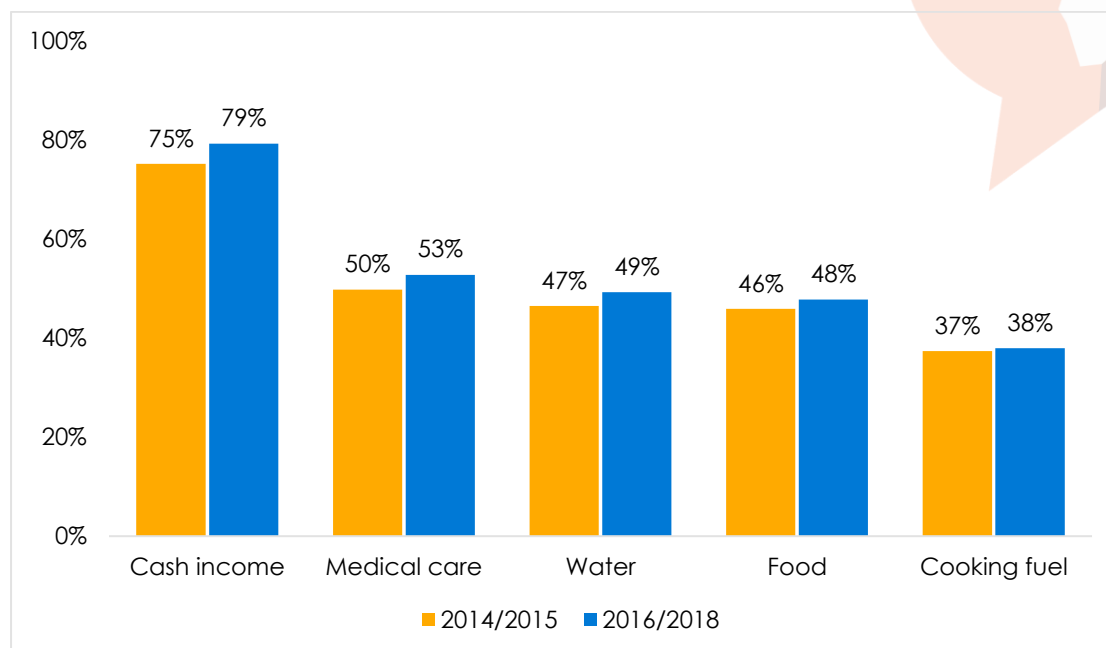
Moreover, the overall LPI score (for the same 33 countries) increased from 1.16 to 1.22, although the average proportion who experienced severe shortages remained constant at 18%. Not coincidentally, Africa's period of macroeconomic expansion came to a halt

⁶ At the macro level, Pearson's $r=0.947$, $p=0.000$ ($n=34$). At the micro level, Pearson's $r=0.751$, $p=0.000$ ($n=40,737$).

⁷ Measured as a one-tailed test comparing the Round 6 index score for each country to its Round 5 score, plus or minus twice the standard error. Generally, this means that the differences in the LPI scores should be larger than +/-0.05 points.

around 2015. The period from 2015 to 2018, in contrast, has been characterized by falling demand for Africa's commodities and reduced economic growth (Cheeseman, 2019).

Figure 9: Change in deprivation (at least once) | 33 countries | 2014-2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income? (% who say "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always")

Examining longer-term trends is slightly more complicated. Because Afrobarometer has expanded over time, different sets of countries have to be examined over different time spans.

To obtain the longest trend, we examine the 16 countries that have been included in each wave of Afrobarometer since Round 2 (2002/2003).⁸ This reveals a slight increase in lived poverty from 2002/2003 to 2005/2006 (from 1.26 to 1.31) followed by a long-term decline over the next decade (from 1.31 to a low of 1.02 in 2015/2016). At that point, however, lived poverty moves upward again, from 1.02 to 1.11 (Figure 10).

When we examine a broader range of countries on a shorter time scale, we find that while the overall level of lived poverty changes slightly, the over-time trend does not. Amongst the 18 countries that have been included since 2005/2006,⁹ the 20 countries included since 2008/2009,¹⁰ and the 31 countries included since 2011/2013,¹¹ levels of lived poverty are slightly higher, but the over-time trends are the same.

We find similar trends in severe lived poverty (Figure 11). Amongst our longest-running set of 16 countries, the proportion of people who experience frequent shortages across the full basket of basic necessities stood at 19% in 2002/2003 and increased to 22% in 2005/2006.

⁸ Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

⁹ The 16 countries listed in Footnote 8, plus Benin and Madagascar.

¹⁰ The 18 countries listed in footnotes 8 and 9, plus Burkina Faso and Liberia.

¹¹ The 20 countries listed in footnotes 8-10, plus Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, eSwatini, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

After that, severe lived poverty declined consistently over the next three survey rounds, falling by 8 percentage points and bottoming out at 14% in 2014/2015, where it stayed in 2016/2018. Again, levels of severe lived poverty rise slightly as we examine larger sets of countries, but the trend stays the same.

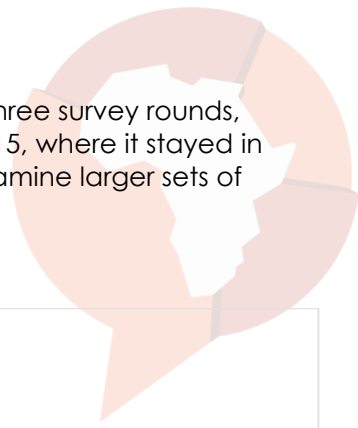


Figure 10: LPI over time | various country samples | 2002-2018

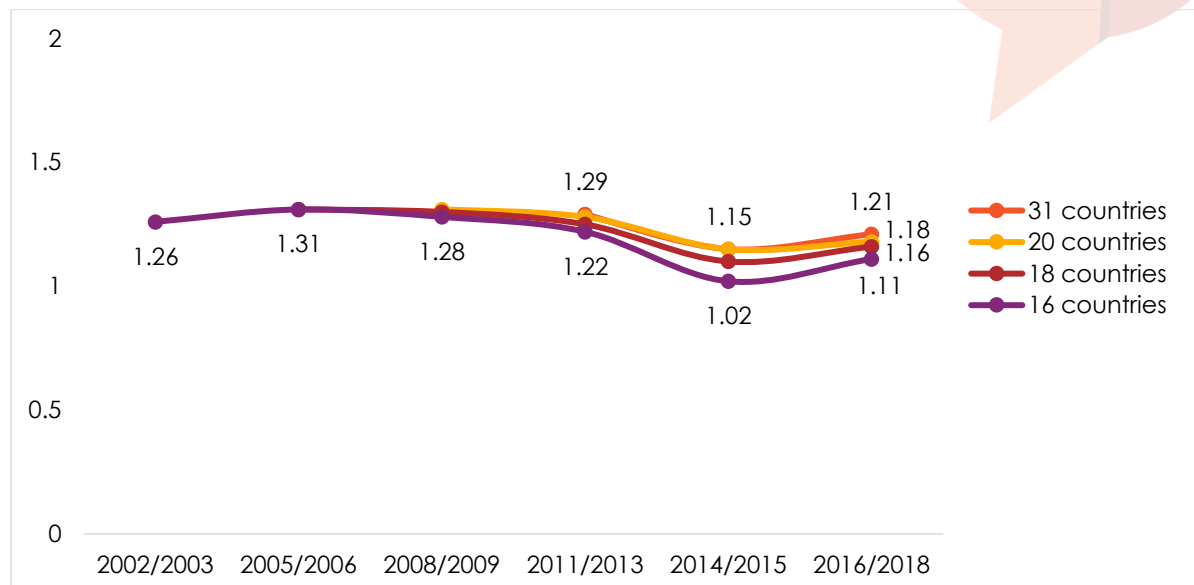
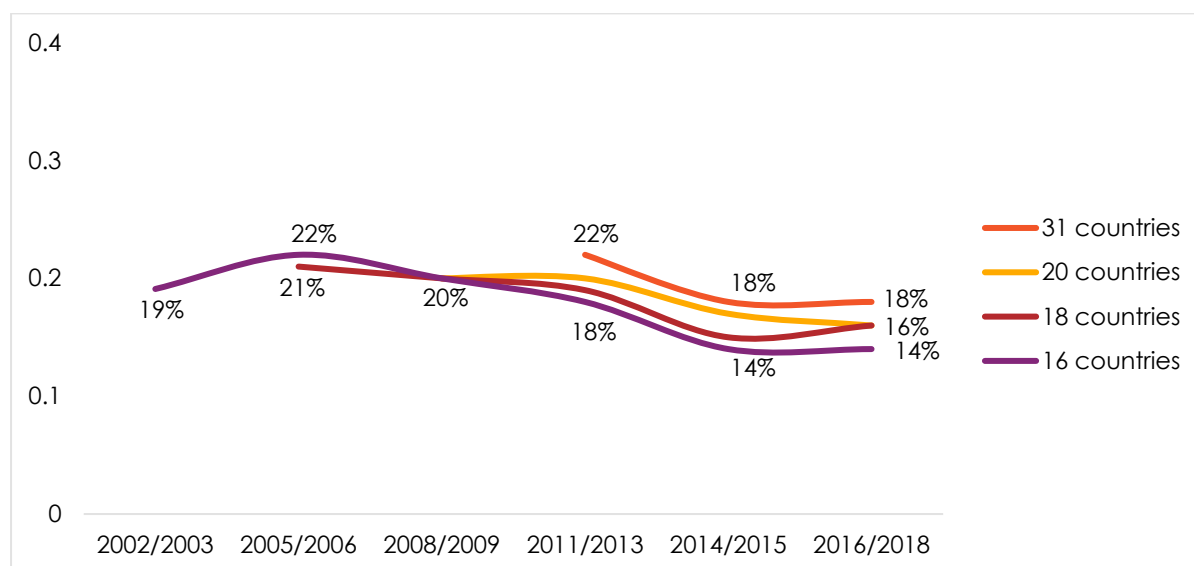


Figure 11: Severe lived poverty over time | various country samples | 2002-2018



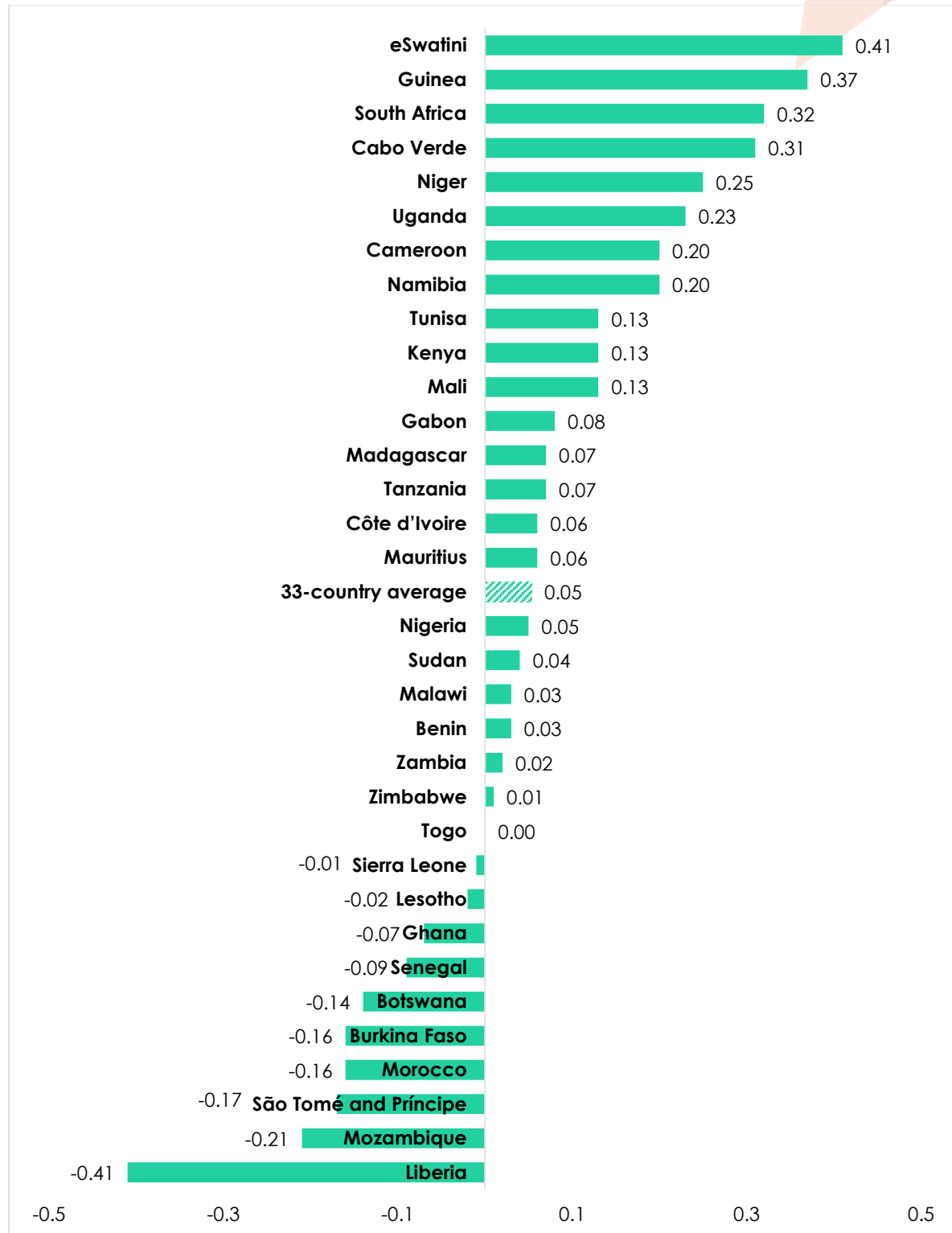
Thus, whether viewed as an overall average of lived poverty or as a proportion of people experiencing severe shortages, the message is essentially the same: Over a decade-long span between 2005 and 2015, Africa witnessed real reductions in lived poverty. That downward trend, however, came to a halt over the past three years, and poverty may have begun to increase again.

National trends

Once we disaggregate our sample by country, over-time trends in poverty become more complicated. A short-gauge comparison using the 33 countries included in the past two

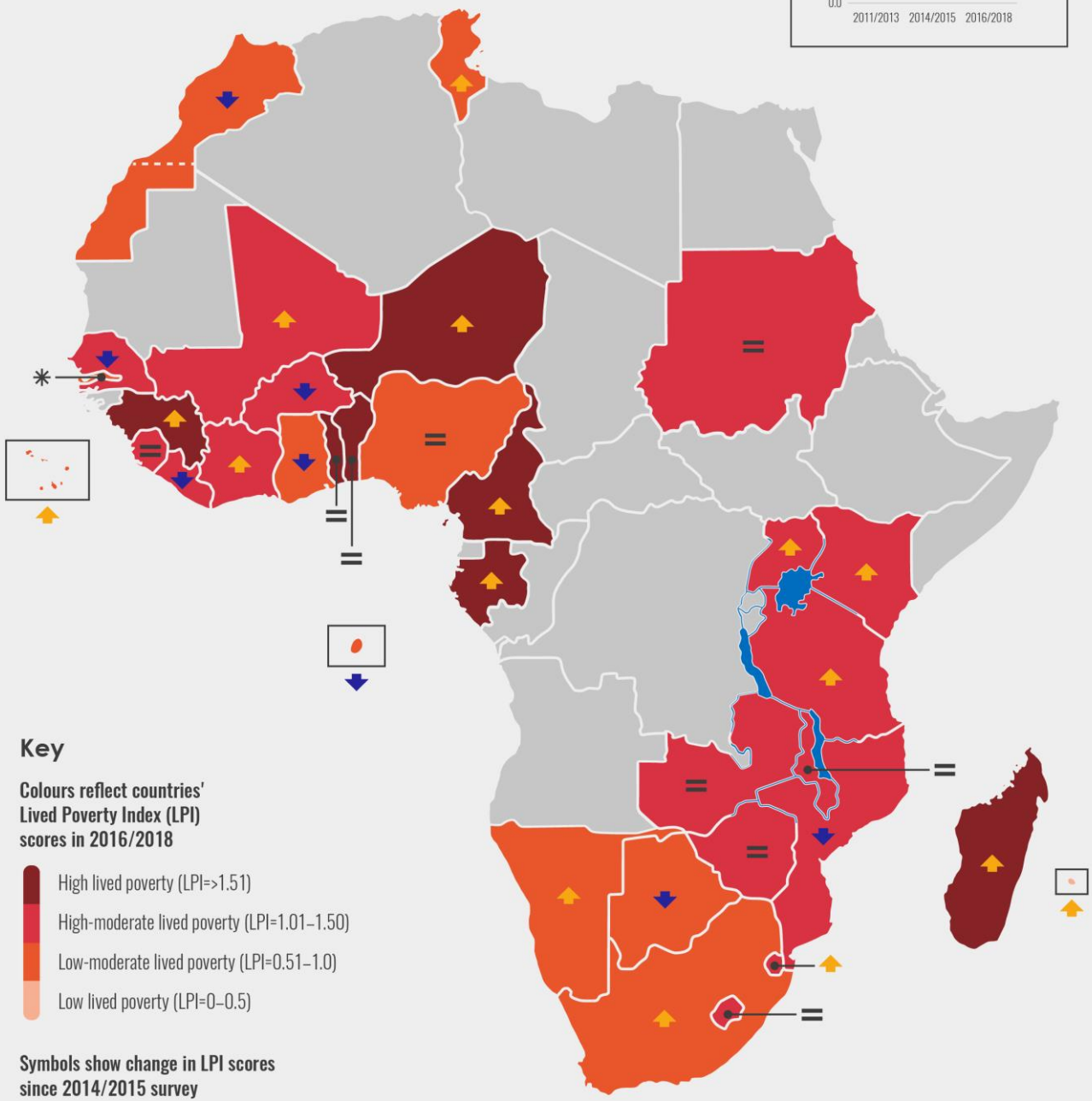
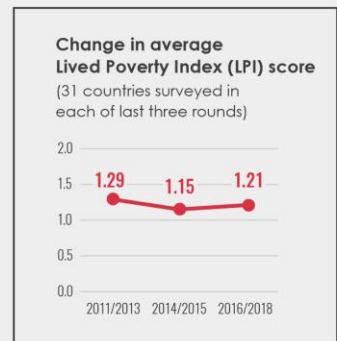
rounds of surveys tends to support the general conclusion that poverty has begun to increase. As we see in Figure 12, LPI scores increased in 16 countries (using +/-0.05 as the cut-off for significant change), with particularly large increases in eSwatini, Guinea, South Africa and Cabo Verde. Yet poverty also remained unchanged in nine countries and decreased in eight countries, with especially large decreases in Mozambique and Liberia.

Figure 12: Change in LPI | 33 countries | 2014-2018



Lived poverty in Africa

34 countries | 2016/2018



In terms of severe lived poverty, an analysis of short-term trends reveals similar changes.¹² Severe lived poverty saw statistically significant (defined as larger than +/-3 percentage points) increases in 11 countries and declines in eight (Figure 13).

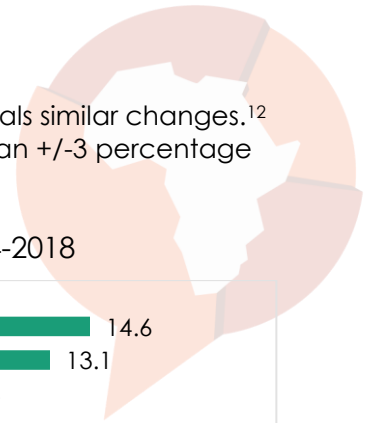
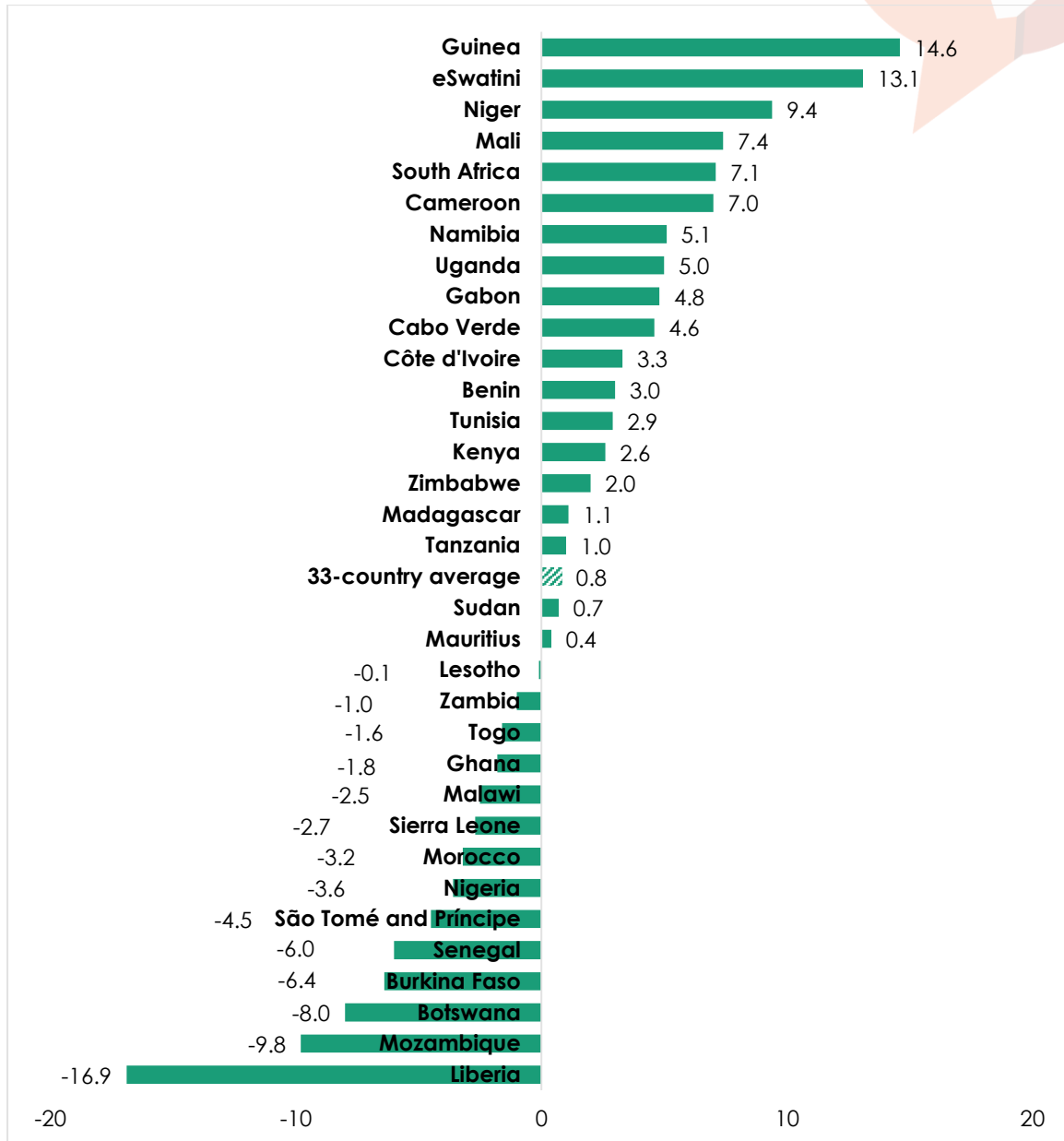


Figure 13: Change in severe lived poverty | 33 countries | 2014-2018



Over a longer time span, looking at the 20 countries for which we have at least four surveys, we find that countries tend to fit into one of two groups. In the first group of nine countries, we see real long-term poverty reduction, whether viewed in terms of the average LPI score (Figure 14) or the severe lived poverty proportion (Figure 15). Though some of these countries witnessed reverses during the most recent period, the average person is substantially better off in 2016/2018 than she/he was 15 years earlier.

¹² Across 33 countries, the change in aggregate LPI scores is strongly correlated with the change in aggregate percentages of severe lived poverty (Pearson's $r=0.938$, $p<.000$).

Figure 14: Long-term decreases in LPI scores | 20 countries | 2002-2018

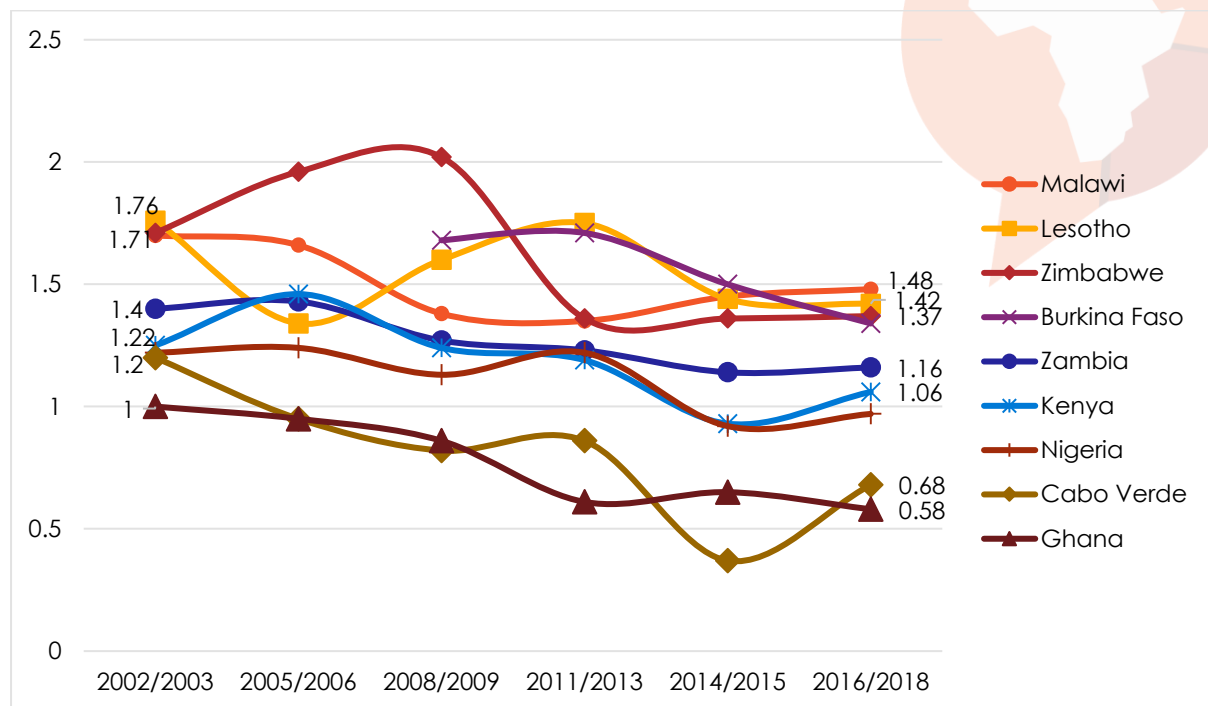
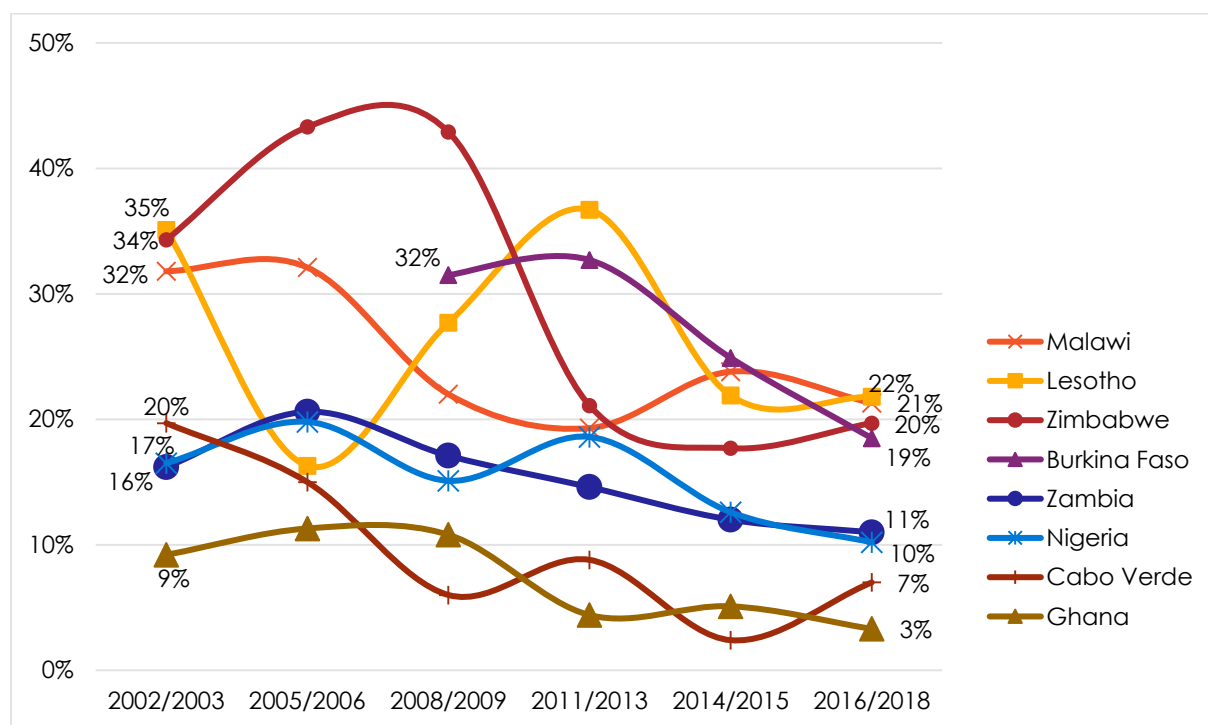


Figure 15: Long-term decreases in severe lived poverty | 20 countries | 2002-2018



However, in a second group of four countries, lived poverty has been increasing on a relatively consistent basis. In Madagascar, Benin, Senegal, and South Africa, the average person experiences significantly more shortages in 2016/2018 than she/he did 10-15 years earlier (Figure 16). The same upward trend also exists in severe lived poverty in Madagascar, Benin, and Senegal (Figure 17), though not in South Africa.

Figure 16: Long-term increases in LPI | 20 countries | 2002-2018

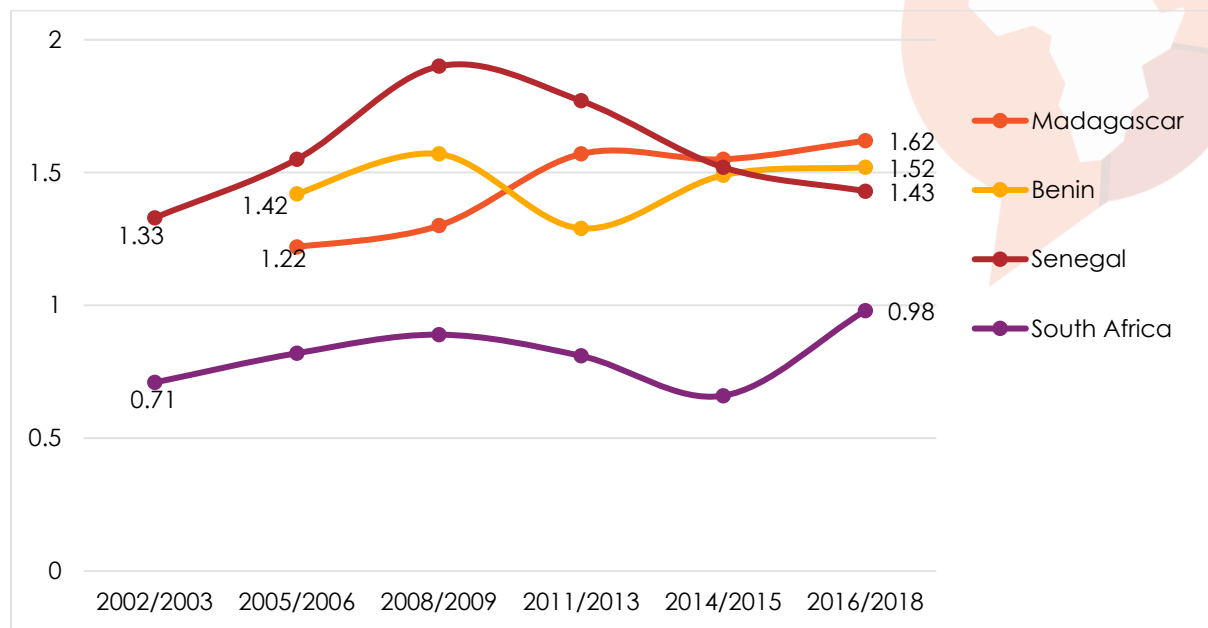
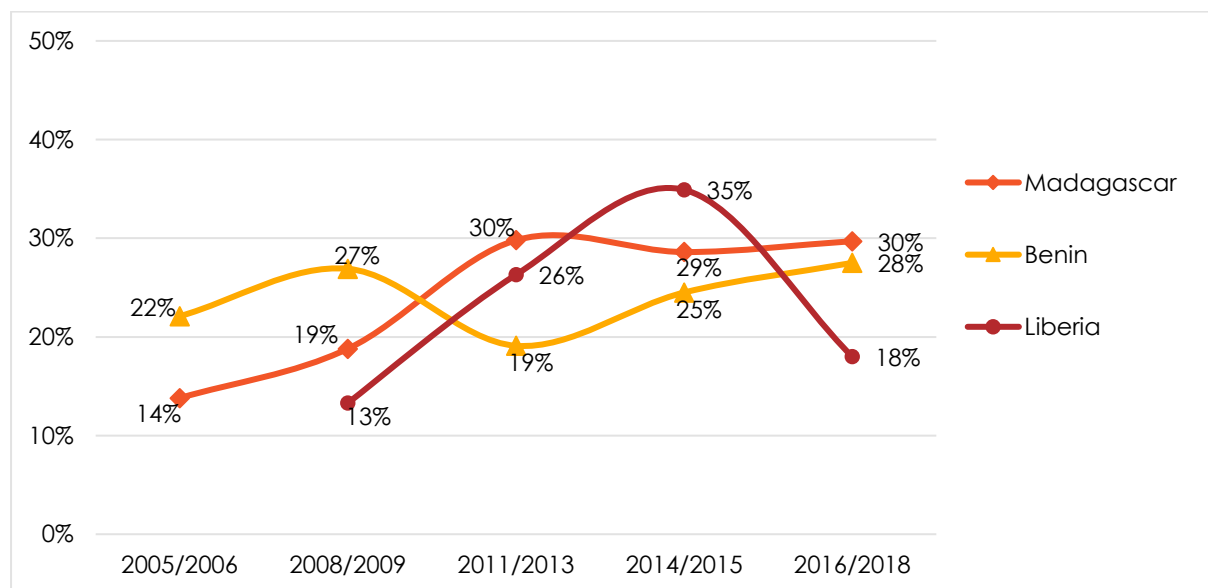


Figure 17: Long-term increases in severe lived poverty | 20 countries | 2002-2018



Understanding lived poverty dynamics

Understanding why poverty is characterized by different trends in different countries requires us to explore both the sources of individual poverty at a given point in time and the important things that have changed over time. We begin with an analysis of the differences in lived poverty across more than 40,000 individual respondents as of 2016/2018.

National-level sources of lived poverty

Individual livelihoods have their potential sources in a number of factors that can be located at differing levels of analysis. At the broadest level, ordinary people are in some respects -- and despite individual differences in dispositions or industriousness -- hostage to the overall wealth of the society in which they find themselves. Unless wealth is overwhelmingly

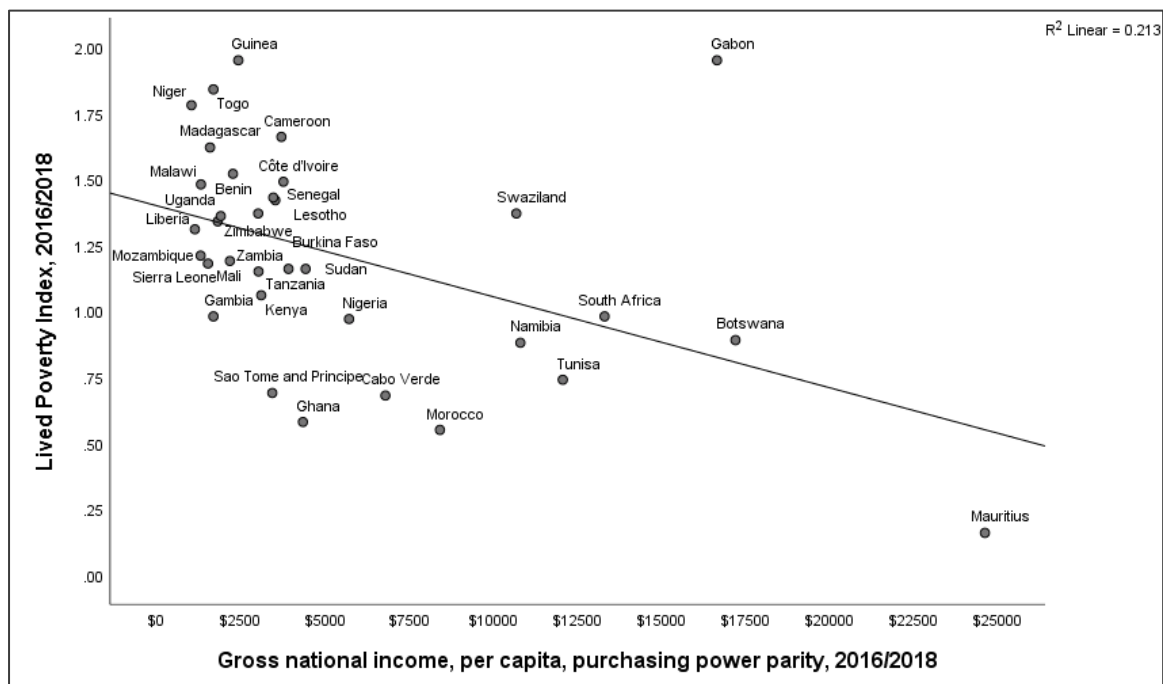
concentrated in one section of society, wealthy societies are generally characterized by a wider prevalence of private and state enterprises that can employ people and provide meaningful wages. Wealthier societies are also more likely to have states with the necessary resources to provide basic services such as water, sewerage, and electricity.

An examination of the relationship between lived poverty and gross national income (GNI) per capita (adjusted for purchasing power parity) suggests that levels of lived poverty fall as national wealth increases (Figure 18). However, the strength of this relationship is rather modest ($r = -.462$, $p = .006$, $n = 34$). While lived poverty appears to decline rapidly as GNI approaches \$5,000 per person, it does not necessarily decline thereafter. Increasing levels of wealth have translated into relatively low levels of lived poverty in Cabo Verde, Morocco, Tunisia, and Mauritius, but poverty remains higher than national wealth would predict in eSwatini, Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana.

We can also see that lived poverty may vary widely across different countries with the same GNI. For example, Gambia, with a GNI of just under \$2,500 per capita, has an LPI score of 0.98, while Togo, at the same level of GNI, has an LPI score over 1.8, with many countries in between.

One reason that the relationship between lived poverty and national wealth is relatively weak may lie in the quality of the wealth data. National statistics agencies in many African countries lack the resources to collect the necessary information to produce reliable numbers (Jerven, 2013). Moreover, national wealth as measured through national accounts data often fails to reveal how that wealth is distributed across society. Gabon, for example, stands out as a significant outlier, as its oil-export-driven economy gives it one of the highest GNI among these 34 countries even as Gabonese suffer extremely high levels of deprivation.

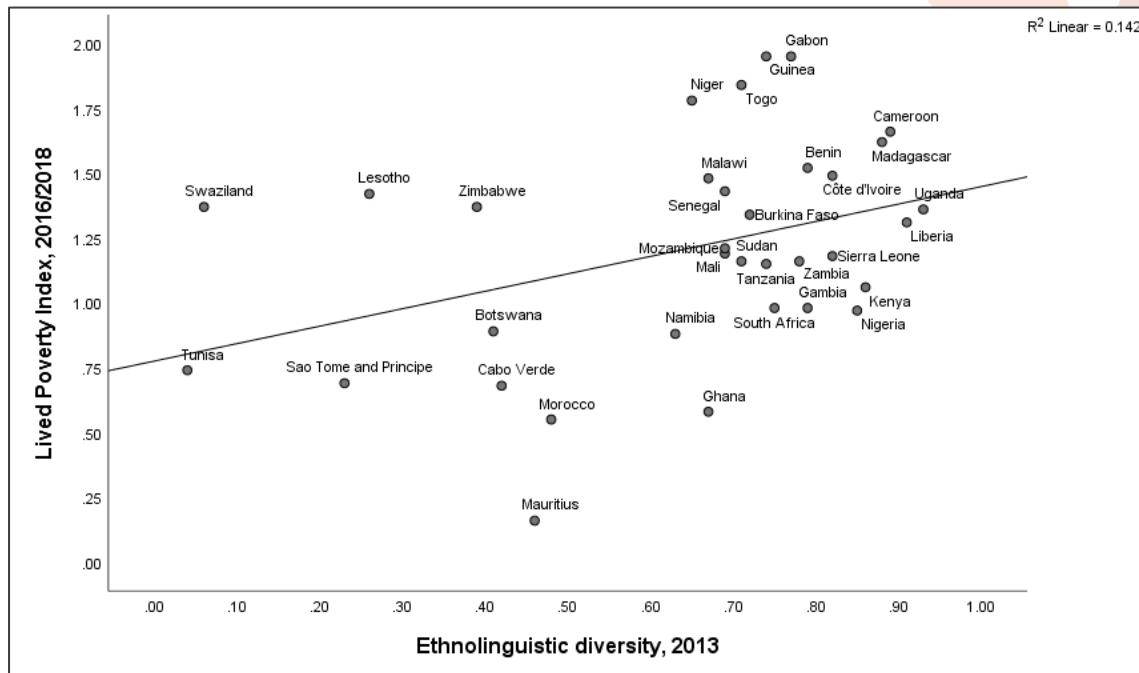
Figure 18: National wealth and lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018



A second attribute of African countries often cited by scholars as a key factor in wealth creation is the level of ethnic diversity (e.g. Easterly & Levine, 1997; Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003). In Figure 19, we correlate lived poverty with the level of ethnic “fractionalization,” defined as the probability that any two people drawn at random from the same country will belong to different ethnic groups, measured as of 2013, the most recent year available (Drazanova, 2019). While countries with high levels of heterogeneity

cluster at higher levels of lived poverty, we can see that relatively more homogeneous countries have both low and high levels of poverty and thus produce a relatively weak relationship ($r=.377$, $p=.028$).

Figure 19: Ethnolinguistic diversity and lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018



A final national-level attribute increasingly identified by scholars as an important factor in economic development is the nature of the political regime. Scholars once thought that authoritarian regimes in developing countries enjoyed an advantage over their democratic counterparts because they were more likely to maintain political order (Huntington, 1968) or make hard economic choices, such as investing scarce resources in education and long-term infrastructure projects rather than short-term welfare programs.

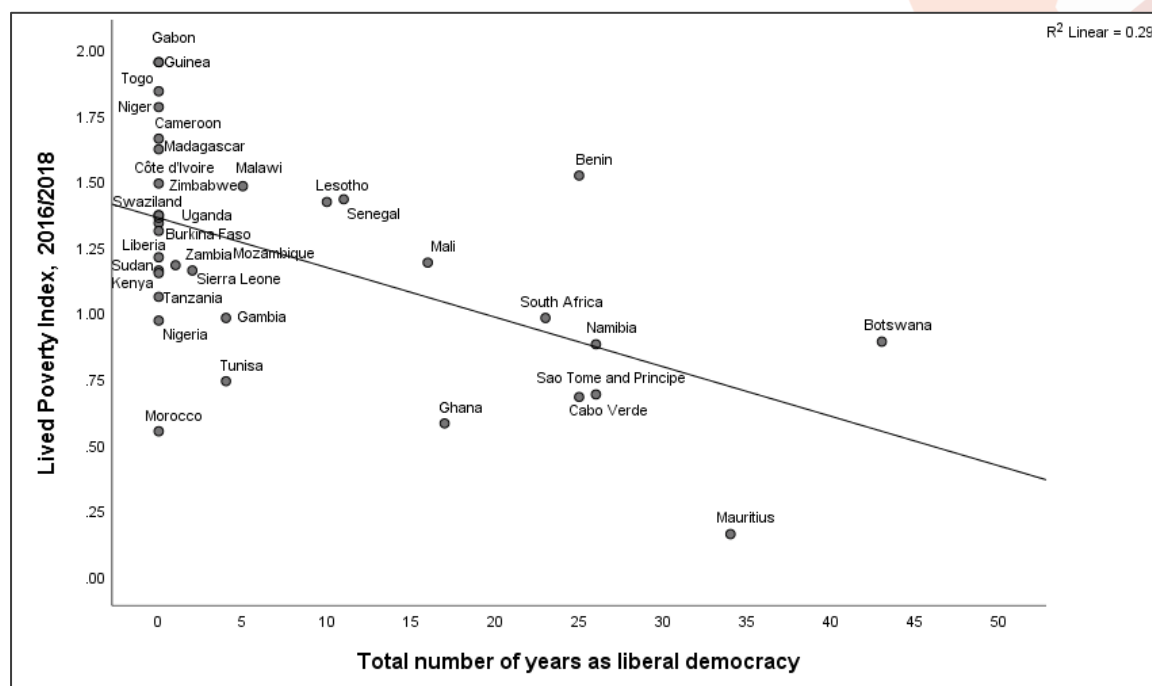
But beginning with the work of Morton Halperin and his colleagues (2005), a steady stream of scholars of comparative politics have reported evidence of a “democracy advantage” in terms of development. In Africa, scholars have found that democracies are more likely to undertake necessary economic reforms (Levy, 2006; Bates & Block, 2018) and pursue better economic policies (Ndulu, O’Connell, Collier, Bates, & Soludo, 2008), produce higher levels of growth (Ndulu & O’Connell, 1999; Levy, 2006; Ndulu et al., 2008; Lewis, 2012; Carbone, Memoli, & Quartapelle, 2016; Masaki & Van de Walle, 2018), and provide public goods (Bates & Block, 2018) such as education (Stasavage, 2005) and electricity (Aklin, Bayer, Harish, & Urpelainen, 2018; Kroth, Larcinese, & Wehner, 2016).¹³

To test whether African democracies have lower levels of lived poverty, we correlated 2016/2018 LPI scores with the total number of consecutive years (as of the date of the Round 7 survey) that a country had been classified by Freedom House as a liberal democracy (an electoral democracy that is also rated as “free”) (Figure 20). While the relationship is far from perfect ($r=-.543$, $p=.001$, $n=34$), it is stronger than the relationship of lived poverty with national wealth. None of the countries with LPI levels greater than 1.5 have ever been a full democracy (Gabon, Guinea, Togo, Niger, Cameroon, Madagascar). And with the

¹³ Carbone and Pellegata (2020) argue that it is not the level of democracy *per se* that matters as much as the frequency of leadership turnover, either through elections or enforced term limits. For a review of this literature, see Lewis (2019).

exception of Benin, all countries with at least 15 years of experience of liberal democracy have LPI scores under 1.25.

Figure 20: Years as democracy and lived poverty | 34 countries | 2017/2018



Sub-national, community-level sources of lived poverty

Regardless of one's personal abilities, individuals' livelihoods are also likely shaped by characteristics of their immediate surroundings, such as the presence and quality of local services such as water and electricity grids and good transportation.

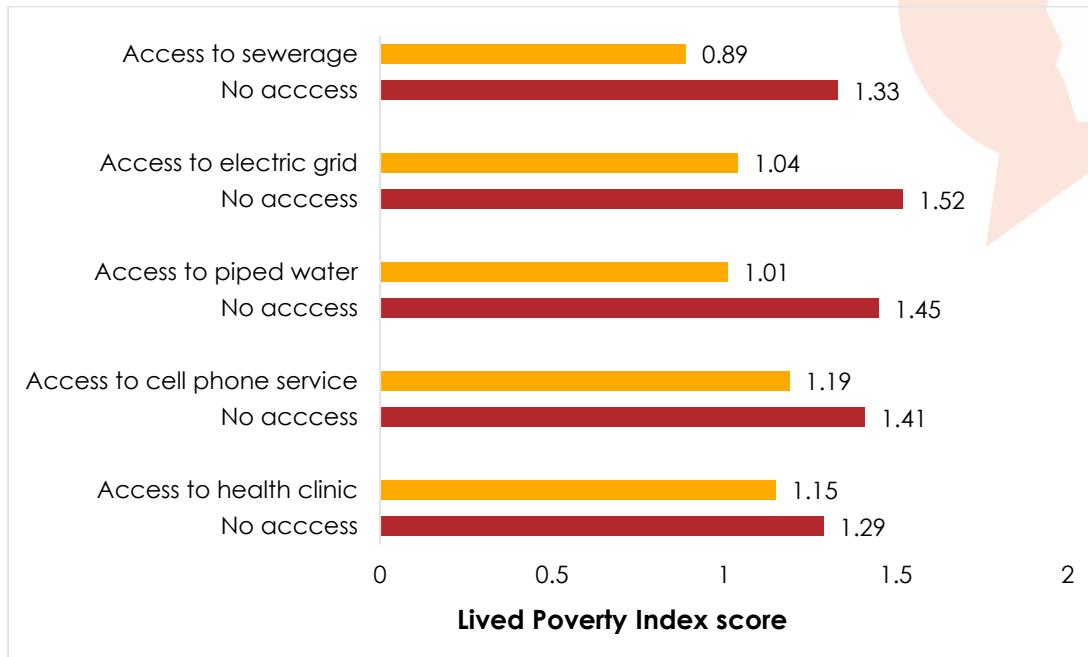
The following two graphs examine the potential impact of service provision on individual-level poverty.¹⁴ They suggest that the presence of development infrastructure (typically, but not always, supplied by the state) has a substantial impact by enabling people to live better lives. People who live in areas with infrastructure such as sewerage, an electricity grid, piped water, cell phone reception, and an accessible health clinic are far less likely to report experiencing shortages of basic necessities (Figure 21).¹⁵ The presence and quality of road networks and transportation matter as well: Where Afrobarometer fieldworkers observed paved or improved roads in the communities they surveyed, people were less likely to experience shortages of basic necessities (Figure 22).¹⁶

¹⁴ We say "potential impact" since the direction of causality is not self-evident. It could be that levels of poverty are lower in serviced communities because people who are relatively better off are able to escape their surroundings and move to serviced areas, leaving their worse-off compatriots behind. It could also be that people living in middle-class and working-class areas are better able to mobilize politically to put more pressure on policymakers to target state services in their areas.

¹⁵ For sewerage, Pearson's $r = -.206$, $p < .001$; electricity grid, Pearson's $r = -.246$, $p < .001$; piped water, Pearson's $r = -.236$, $p < .001$; health clinics, Pearson's $r = -.075$, $p < .001$; and cell phone service, Pearson's $r = -.069$, $p < .001$.

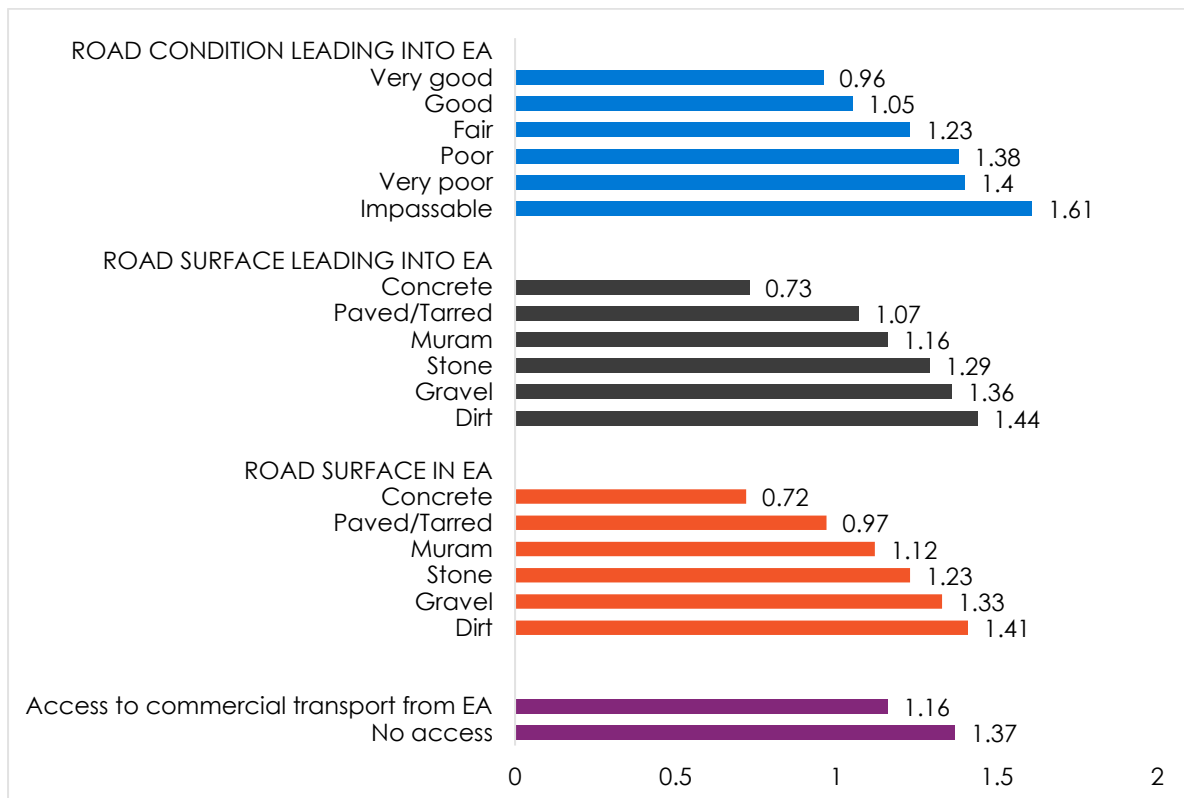
¹⁶ For the presence of tarred/paved roads in the enumeration area (EA), Pearson's $r = -.229$, $p < .001$; the surface of the road leading to the EA, Pearson's $r = -.196$, $p < .001$; and the quality of the road surface leading into the EA, Pearson's $r = -.179$, $p < .001$.

Figure 21: Connections between development infrastructure and lived poverty
| 34 countries | 2016/2018



In each enumeration area, **Afrobarometer enumerators recorded** the presence or absence of key infrastructure, including an electricity grid, piped-water system, sewage system, mobile-phone service, and health clinic.

Figure 22: Connections between transport infrastructure and lived poverty
| 34 countries | 2016/2018

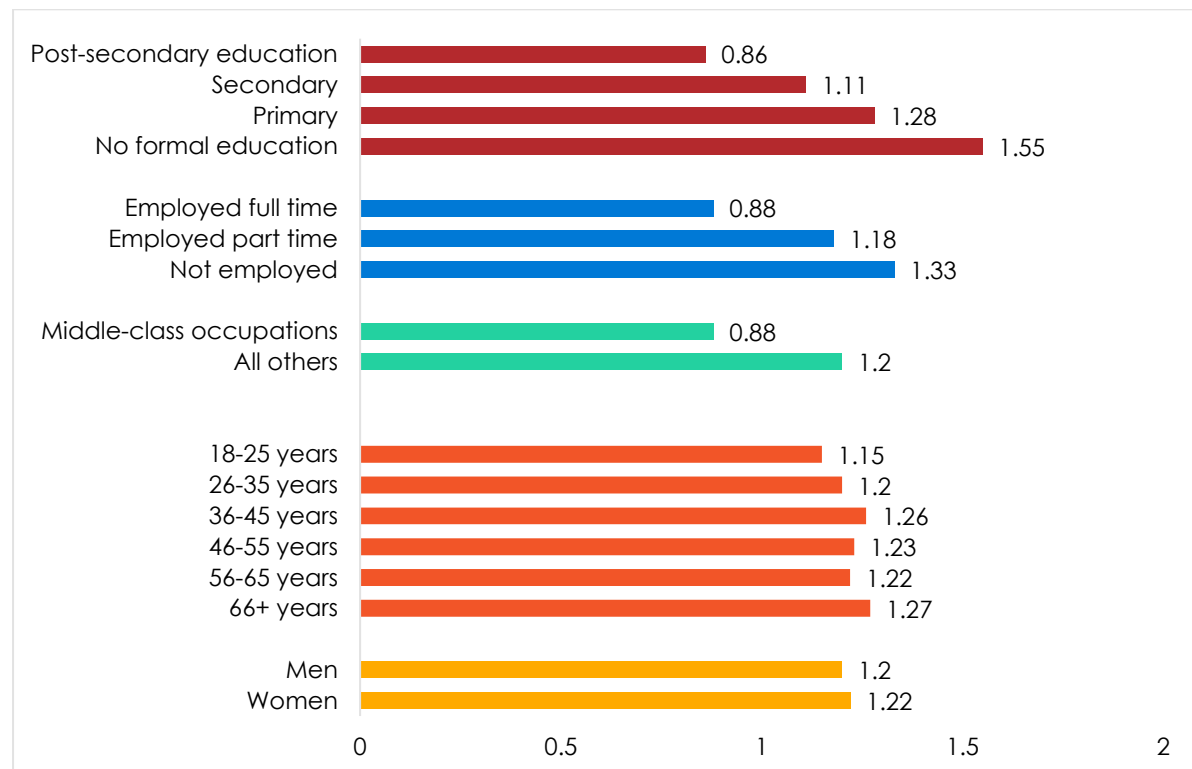


In each enumeration area, **Afrobarometer enumerators recorded** the road surface and condition leading into the EA and the road surface in the EA, as well as the presence or absence of "any kind of paid transport, such as a bus, taxi, moped, or other form, available on a daily basis."

Individual-level sources of lived poverty

Finally, individual characteristics and attributes might also be associated with levels of lived poverty. We find, for example, that respondents with higher levels of education experience substantially lower levels of lived poverty, as do those who have a full-time job or work in a middle-class occupation (Figure 23).¹⁷ There are smaller differences by age, and surprisingly little difference between men and women, though this is probably because the survey questions did not ask only about respondents' own experience but about anyone in the household who had experienced shortages.

Figure 23: Individual-level sources of lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Lived poverty and inequality

At the beginning of this paper, we focused on national average lived poverty scores (Figure 4) and the large differences in these average scores across African countries. Yet these mean scores also mask similarly large differences *within* countries, associated, for example, with whether or not people live in neighbourhoods or villages with state services, have a high school education, or have a steady job. Indeed, the individual impacts of each of these factors cumulate to produce high levels of overall *within-country inequality* in people's living conditions, as demonstrated by the wide variation in individual mean scores around the national average.

One way to measure this variation, or inequality, is through a statistic known as the "standard deviation," which in this case tells us about the range in lived poverty scores for roughly two-thirds of all respondents below and above the national mean score. Take the country that is most typical: Sudan. Recall that Sudan has a national mean score of 1.16 (see Figure 4). Thus, its standard deviation of 0.92 tells us that 66% of all respondents fall within a range of 1.16 - 0.92 (or 0.24) to 1.16 + 0.92 (or 2.06). In contrast, Mauritius has both the lowest level of lived

¹⁷ For education, Pearson's $r = -.250$, $p < .001$; for rural location, Pearson's $r = -.178$, $p < .001$; for employment, Pearson's $r = -.196$, $p < .001$; and for a middle-class occupation, Pearson's $r = -.110$, $p < .001$.

poverty and the lowest level of inequality, i.e. the smallest standard deviation. With a mean score of 0.16 (see Figure 4) and a standard deviation of 0.38, we can see that two-thirds of Mauritians have scores between 0.00 and 0.54. Inequality is also relatively low, albeit significantly wider than in Mauritius, in São Tomé and Príncipe, Ghana, Morocco, and Botswana (Figure 24).

The vast majority of African countries, however, have lived poverty standard deviations between 0.8 and 0.9. Indeed, at least a dozen countries have standard deviations similar to South Africa (0.88), widely seen as the most unequal country in the world (Van Dalsen & Simkins, 2019).

Figure 24: Lived poverty inequality in Africa | 34 countries | 2016/2018

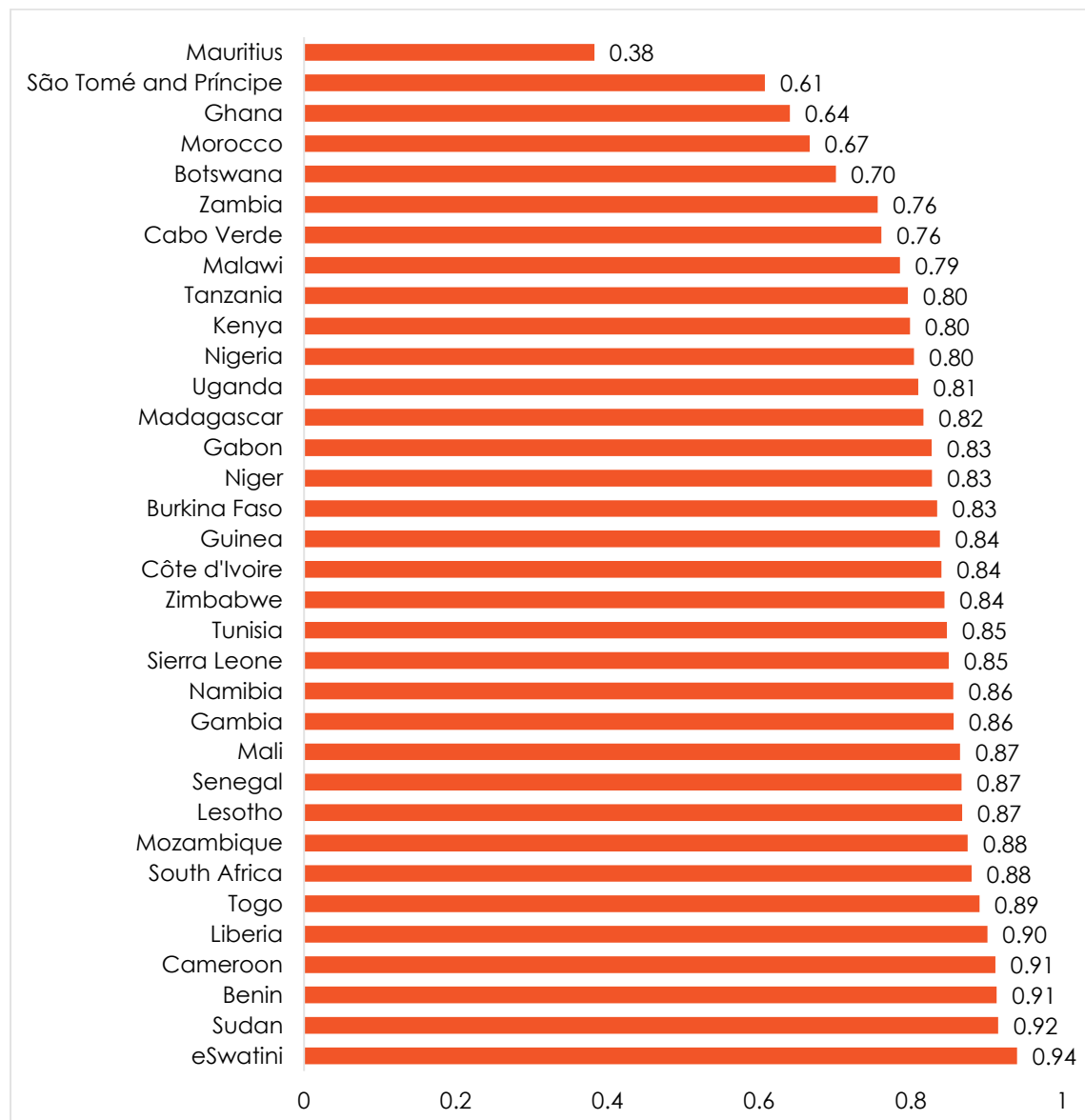


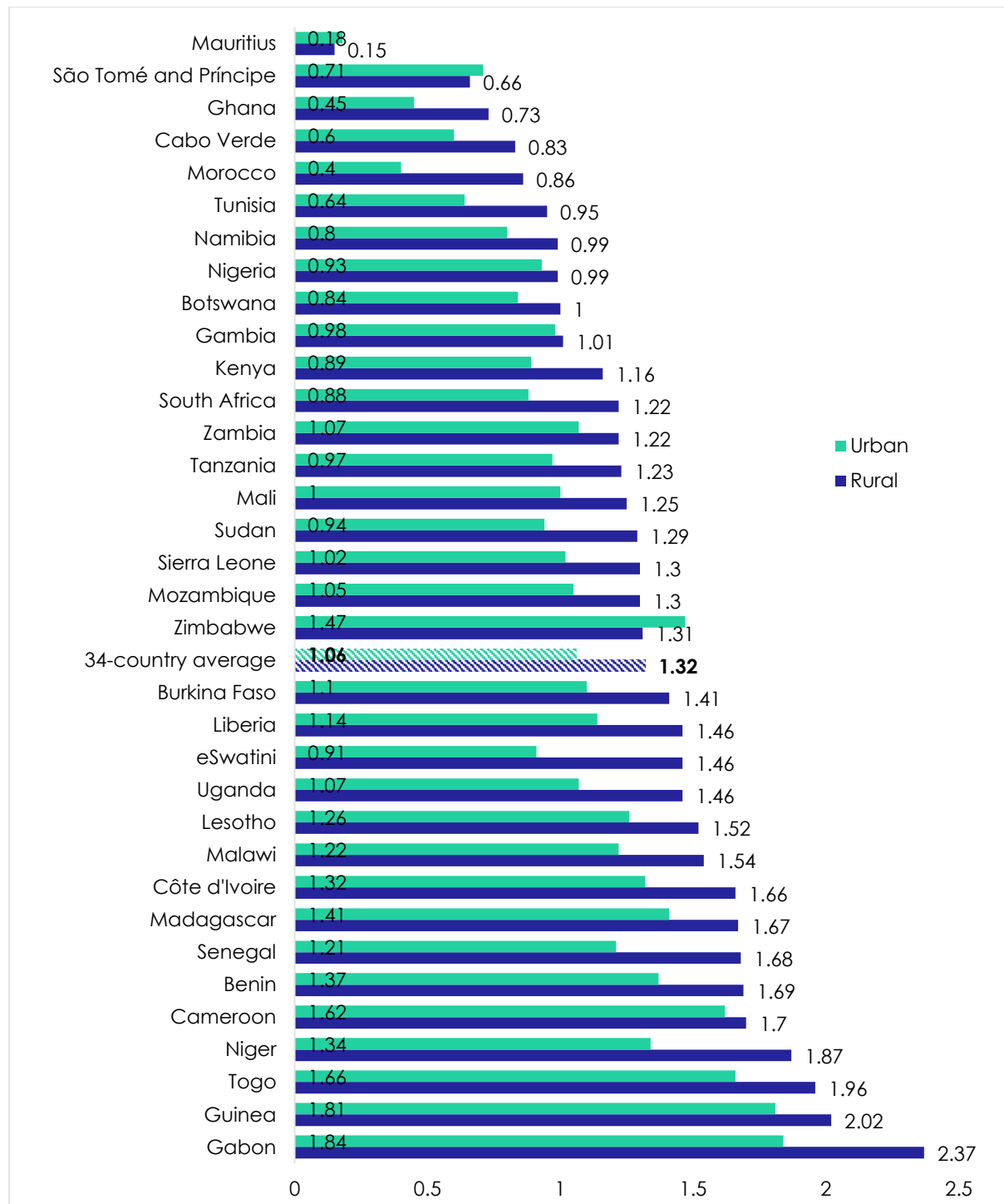
Figure shows the standard deviation of each country's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) score.

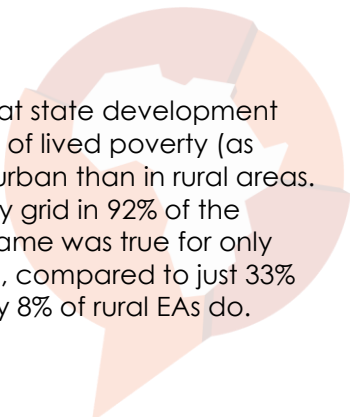
Perhaps the greatest source of this inequality in Africa is the urban-rural divide. Through a combination of Africa's physical topography, colonial boundaries, and colonial patterns of development, African states often feature large numbers of people living in hard-to-access, far-flung rural areas (Herbst, 2000). But post-independence governments tended to widen,

rather than narrow, the importance of the rural-urban divide by pursuing economic policies that favoured groups living in the cities (Lipton, 1977; Bates, 1981).

This divide is still quite visible today. Across all countries, people who live in rural areas, with an average LPI score of 1.36, experience shortages far more frequently than urban dwellers, whose average LPI score is 1.02. The urban advantage exists within virtually every society measured by Afrobarometer. With three exceptions (Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Zimbabwe), rural people are poorer, and in some instances substantially poorer, than those who live in cities and suburban areas (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Urban-rural divide in lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018





One of the main reasons for the current rural-urban discrepancy is that state development infrastructure, which seems to make an important difference in levels of lived poverty (as seen in Figure 21 and Figure 22), is much more likely to be present in urban than in rural areas. For instance, while Afrobarometer interviewers observed an electricity grid in 92% of the urban enumeration areas (EAs) they visited across 34 countries, the same was true for only 44% of rural EAs. Piped-water systems are present in 80% of urban EAs, compared to just 33% of rural areas. And while 49% of urban EAs have sewage systems, only 8% of rural EAs do.

Explaining differences in lived poverty

None of the information presented in these charts is conclusive, however, in explaining why some people are poor and others are not. First, the apparent differences we observe, say between those who live in serviced and non-serviced enumeration areas, might actually be due to differences across wealthier and poorer countries, rather than differences *within* countries. That is, poverty might be higher in countries that have less developed infrastructure, but exhibit little difference between those in serviced and non-serviced neighbourhoods within a country.¹⁸

Second, these factors may not all matter equally. For instance, apparent rural-urban differences might disappear once we take development infrastructure into account, or vice versa. Thus, we want to know which factors are more or less important, taking into account the effect of all factors simultaneously.

Thus, we conduct a multi-level multiple regression analysis of the determinants of lived poverty as measured in 2016/2018 (Table 1). In Model 1, we examine the impact of country-level effects, testing the simultaneous impact of national wealth (GNI per capita), ethnic diversity (ethnic heterogeneity), and regime effects (the number of consecutive years a country had been a liberal democracy at the time of fieldwork). The combined effect of these variables allows us to account for 36% of the country-level differences in LPI scores. Surprisingly, the impact of democracy on poverty remains even when we take into account

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

the simultaneous effects of national wealth and ethnic homogeneity (which are not statistically significant) in lowering poverty.

In Model 2, we test the community-level impacts, including whether the location is rural or urban and whether interviewers observed the presence of the community-level service-

delivery infrastructure discussed above. Because different countries have performed differently in terms of infrastructure development, these variables account for 19% of the variation in lived poverty between countries. But they also account for 19% of the variation between localities. Each of the types of development infrastructure included (paved road, electricity, water, sewerage, cell phones, health clinic) has a statistically significant and negative impact, meaning that where they exist, each one plays an independent role in increasing the well-being of people. It is also important to note that the effect of urban-rural differences does not disappear when we take these facilities into account. That is, in addition to a lack of infrastructure, there are other things that contribute to poverty in rural areas.

Finally, we examine the impact of individual characteristics (Model 3) and find that age, education, employment, and a middle-class occupation all contribute to improved well-being. In addition, women are more likely than men to experience shortages of necessities. These characteristics tend to account for much more of the variation between countries, and between communities, rather than within them. For example, differential levels of

¹⁸ With regard to development infrastructure, we also need to acknowledge that causality might run in the opposite direction. For instance, the data as presented suggest that as governments improve people’s infrastructural surroundings, people are increasingly able to secure their basic necessities. But it could also be that those people with formal jobs are able to move out of poor neighbourhoods to better-serviced areas.

education across countries are more important in distinguishing different levels of poverty than are differential levels of education within countries and communities.

After dropping the two variables that were not significant in the first three models (national wealth and ethnic heterogeneity), we test for the simultaneous effect of all the others. Model 4 demonstrates that all variables retain their statistical significance and impact, though the magnitude of the rural effect falls by about half.

Table 1: Predictors of lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	2.316**	1.436***	1.445***	1.665***
National wealth (logged)	-0.130			--
Ethnic diversity	0.109			--
Years as a democracy	- 0.013*			-0.013***
Rural EA		0.076***		0.036**
Paved road		-0.072***		-0.057***
Electricity grid in EA		-0.120***		-0.081***
Piped-water grid in EA		-0.139***		-0.121***
Sewage system in EA		-0.055***		-0.028*
Cell-phone service in EA		-0.045**		-0.035*
Health clinic in EA		-0.043***		-0.034***
Age (years)			0.002***	0.002***
Employed			-0.075***	-0.070***
Level of education			-0.066***	-0.057***
Middle-class occupation			-0.075***	-0.075***
Female			-0.026***	-0.020**
National R²	.358	.194	.151	.398
Location R²	--	.190	.175	.251
Individual R²	.000	.014	.039	.046
Countries	34	34	34	34
Locations	--	3,064	3,064	3,064
Respondents	40,800	40,800	40,800	40,800

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Explaining trends in lived poverty

Overall, the results in Table 1 suggest the powerful role of macro-level forces in explaining micro-level conditions. Where states are accountable and provide their citizens with free and fair multiparty elections and a wide matrix of rights and liberties, and where they have taken positive steps to develop local communities, people are substantially less likely to suffer destitution. We have to remember, however, that this analysis is an account of differences in poverty at a given time (2016/2018).

While a longitudinal, multi-level account of changing levels of individual lived poverty over several survey rounds lies beyond the scope of this paper, we can gain some purchase on an explanation of over-time changes in poverty by combining the results of the analysis in Table 1 with longitudinal trends collected by Afrobarometer. As we saw above (in Figure 10 and Figure 11), lived poverty fell steadily between 2005 and 2015 but has increased since then. We see similar trends in the delivery of community infrastructure. In Figure 26, returning to the set of 16 countries in which we have conducted the longest series of surveys, we can

see steady increases between 2002 and 2015 in access to electricity grids, health clinics, improved roads, piped water, and cell-phone reception, as well as a very slight increase in access to sewage systems. However, further extension of each of these systems seems to have come to a stop in the past three years, and even receded, though these differences might also be due to slight changes in question wording.¹⁹

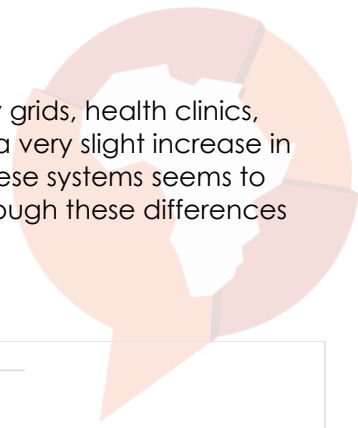
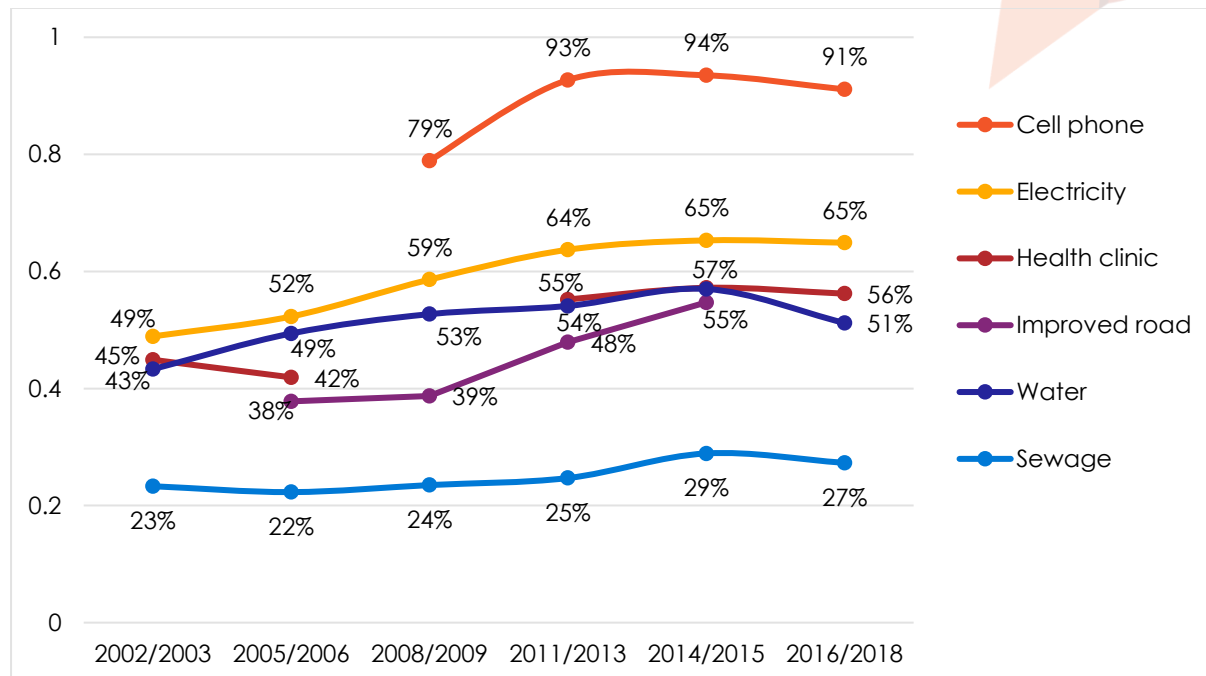


Figure 26: Infrastructural progress | 16 countries | 2002-2018



In each enumeration area, **Afrobarometer enumerators recorded** the road surface and the presence or absence of key infrastructure, including an electricity grid, piped-water system, sewage system, mobile-phone service, and health clinic.

Not only have governments been working with development partners to roll out infrastructure to larger numbers of communities, but they have also been making increased efforts in rural areas. In 2002/2003, Afrobarometer interviewers observed electricity grids in 87% of urban areas compared to just 27% of rural zones. By 2016/2018, those numbers had increased to 95% and 42% across the same 16 countries (Figure 27). Similarly, interviewers reported improved roads in just 26% of rural EAs in 2005/2006, compared to 63% in urban areas, whereas by 2014/2015 the gap had narrowed to 43% and 75%, respectively (Figure 28). And while cell-phone coverage was virtually universal in urban areas when we began asking about it, access in the countryside surged from three-quarters to nine in 10 communities (Figure 29).²⁰

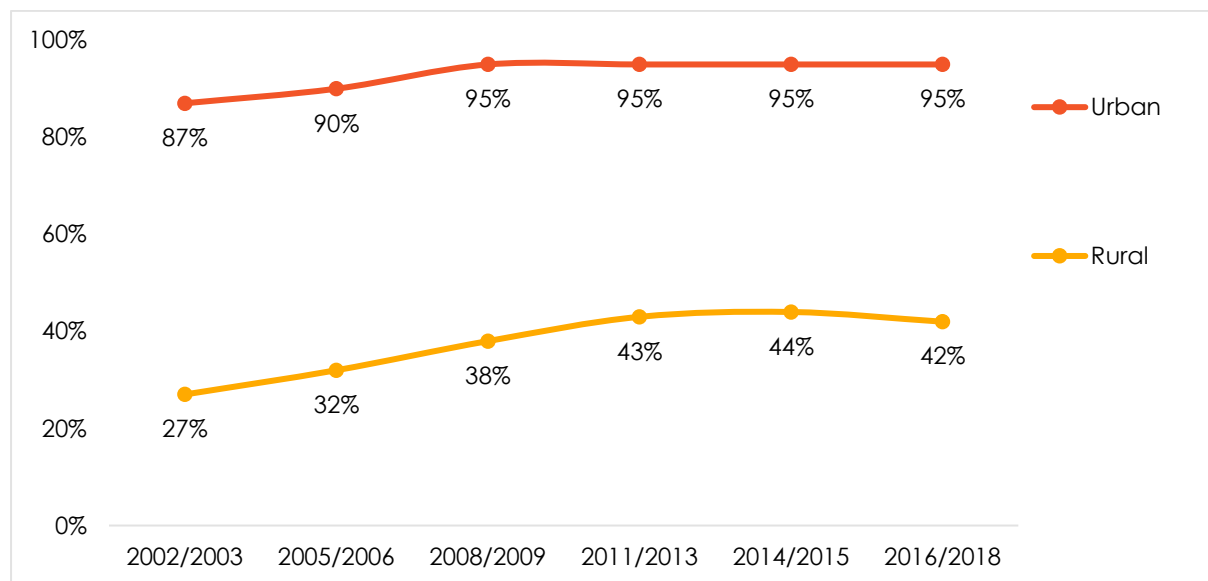
¹⁹ Until Round 6, the Afrobarometer question about electricity, water, and sewerage asked about the presence of a system that “most houses could access.” In Round 7, the wording changed slightly to systems that “most houses can access.” For phones, the question wording changed from “cell phone service” to “mobile phone service.” And the Round 7 question on roads provided a range of different surface options, which made it non-comparable to previous results.

²⁰ However, these trends are not visible in all forms of development infrastructure. While access to water grids has increased, the 50-percentage-point gap between the proportion of urban and rural EAs with piped-water grids has remained constant over the past 15 years. And the presence of sewage systems has remained at fewer than one in 10 rural EAs over the same time period, while the coverage for urban EAs has increased, thus widening the gap.

Thus, not only did poverty decline, but rural-urban differences in lived poverty also narrowed over this period. Whether measured as average lived poverty (Figure 30) or severe lived poverty (Figure 31), the living conditions of rural dwellers improved steadily vis-à-vis their urban counterparts.

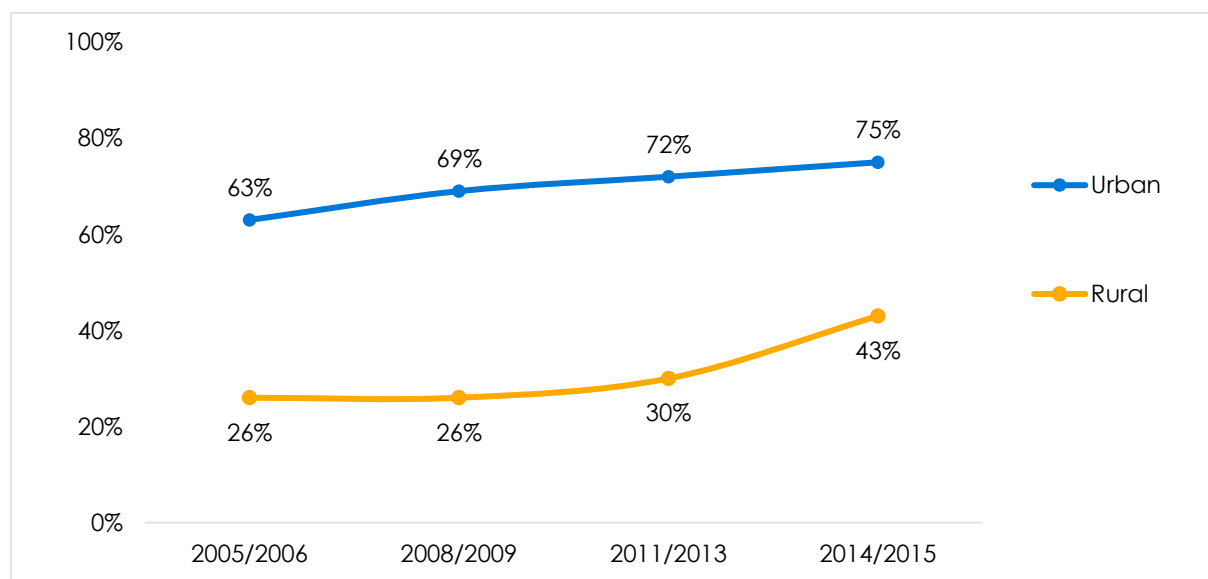
This process has its roots in the confluence of democratization and infrastructural development. While the sharp rural-urban divide reflects the legacy of the “urban bias” of colonial and post-independence autocratic government (Lipton, 1977; Bates, 1981), many political scientists have argued that the advent of multiparty competition changed the equation. Noting similar advancements in rural child health and rural education across 27 African countries, Robin Harding (forthcoming) argues that ruling parties tend to face greater opposition from urban voters and thus have electoral incentives to expand basic services in the countryside in order to win re-election.

Figure 27: Shrinking rural-urban gap – electricity | 16 countries | 2002-2018



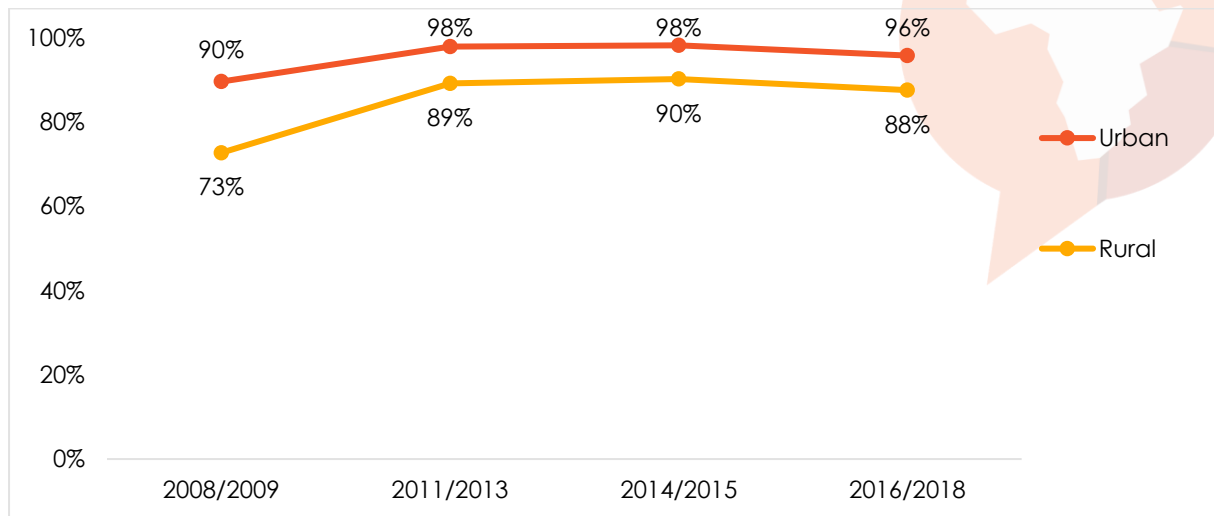
In each enumeration area, **Afrobarometer enumerators recorded** the presence or absence of key infrastructure, including “an electricity grid that most houses can access.”

Figure 28: Shrinking rural-urban gap – improved roads | 16 countries | 2002-2015



In each enumeration area, **Afrobarometer enumerators recorded** the road surface.

Figure 29: Shrinking rural-urban gap – cell-phone service | 16 countries | 2002-2018



In each enumeration area, **Afrobarometer enumerators recorded** the presence or absence of key infrastructure, including mobile-phone service.

Figure 30: Rural-urban divide in LPI over time | 16 countries | 2002-2018

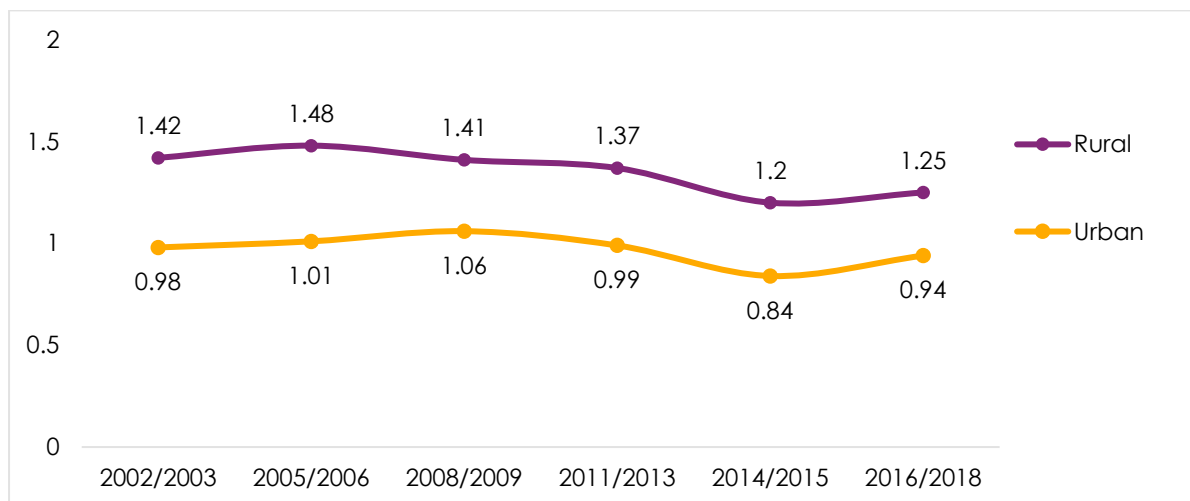
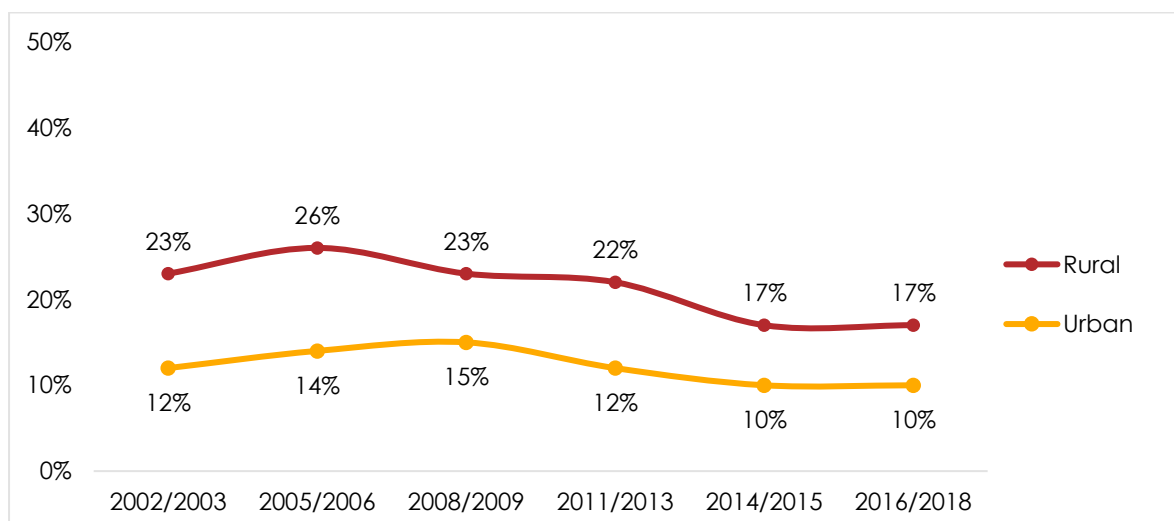


Figure 31: Rural-urban divide in severe lived poverty over time | 16 countries | 2002-2018



Conclusions

This longitudinal review of Afrobarometer data shows that the continent made real progress between 2005 and 2015 in terms of poverty reduction. Measured as the frequency with which people go without a basket of basic necessities, “lived poverty” dropped in a sustained fashion over this period.

The most recent Afrobarometer surveys, however, conducted between late 2016 and late 2018, suggest that Africa is in danger of squandering these gains in living standards. The frequency with which Africans experience shortages of food, clean water, health care, heating fuel, and cash income began to move back upwards. In the roughly three-year period between Round 6 (2014/2015) and Round 7 (2016/2018) surveys, our data suggest that lived poverty increased in 16 of the 33 countries surveyed in both rounds.

We see a similar trend in “severe lived poverty,” or the extent to which people experience frequent shortages.

Through a multi-level, multivariate regression analysis of more than 40,000 respondents across Africa, we found that people who live in urban areas, have higher levels of education, and have a job (especially in a middle-class occupation) are less likely to live in poverty, as are younger people and men.

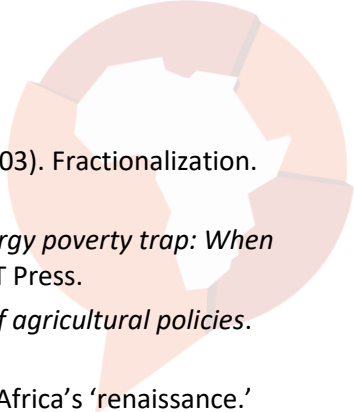
But the analysis also identified the much more important role of the political regime and state development policy. First, people who live in countries that have institutionalized free and fair multiparty elections and provide a wide matrix of rights and liberties are less likely to experience destitution.

Second, people who live in communities where the state has installed key development infrastructure such as paved roads, electricity grids, and piped-water systems are also less likely to go without basic necessities. Indeed, the combined efforts of African governments and international donors in building development infrastructure, especially in rural areas, appears to have played a major role in bringing down levels of poverty – at least until recently.

We ignore these lessons at our peril. If we are to avoid forfeiting the improvements in well-being that resulted from the post-1989 process of democratization, African states and donor partners need to reinvigorate their commitment to expand development infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and governments, civil society, and ordinary people all need to renew their commitment to popular self-government. With a fresh round of elections rolling across the continent, there is no better time to start than now.



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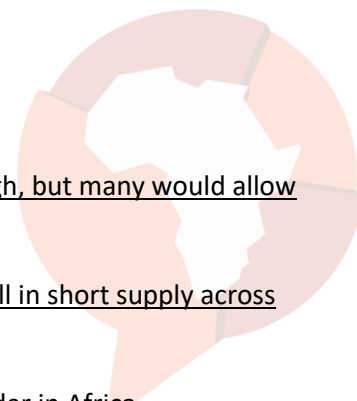
Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 7 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Cabo Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini	March 2018	2013, 2015
Gabon	Nov 2017	2015
Gambia	July-August 2018	N/A
Ghana	Sept 2017	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Guinea	May 2017	2013, 2015
Kenya	Sept-Oct 2016	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Lesotho	Nov-Dec 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Liberia	June-July 2018	2008, 2012, 2015
Madagascar	Jan-Feb 2018	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
Malawi	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Mali	Feb 2017	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Mauritius	Oct-Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Morocco	May 2018	2013, 2015
Mozambique	July-August 2018	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Namibia	Nov 2017	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014
Niger	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Nigeria	April-May 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
São Tomé and Príncipe	July 2018	2015
Senegal	Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Sierra Leone	July 2018	2012, 2015
South Africa	August-Sept 2018	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015
Sudan	July-August 2018	2013, 2015
Tanzania	April-June 2017	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Togo	Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Tunisia	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Uganda	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Zambia	April 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014
Zimbabwe	Jan-Feb 2017	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014

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- ✓ Dispatch 339: Religion in Africa: Tolerance and trust in leaders are high, but many would allow regulation of religious speech
- ✓ Dispatch 334: Prerequisite for progress: Accessible, reliable power still in short supply across Africa
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- ✓ Policy Paper 55: Are Africans’ freedoms slipping away?
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